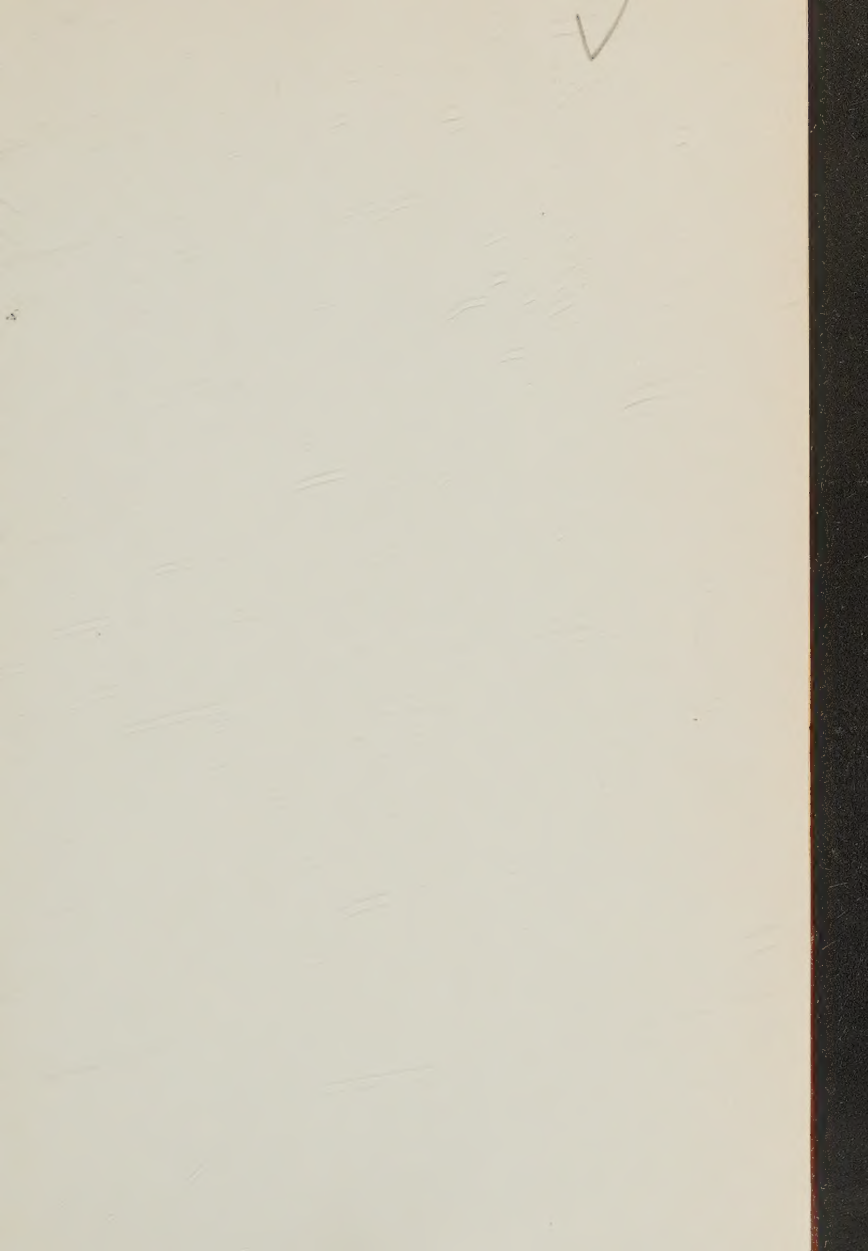


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Chapter IX.

RCC

THE MUSGROVE RANCH, II

A TALE OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA.

BY

T. M. BROWNE,
III

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NEW YORK :

THOMAS WHITTAKER,

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1890.

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THE MUSGROVE RANCH.

CHAPTER I.

THE day had been intensely warm, with little of the ocean-breeze to moderate the heat ; but now the sun had set behind the great shoulder of the mountain to the west of the Hermosa settlement, and in a moment, as it seemed, the temperature fell and a cool air sprang up, waving the foliage of the eucalyptus grove which formed a semicircle round the upper portion of the Musgrove Ranch.

It was the principal ranch of the valley, with the oldest and best cared for orange groves, the largest olives, the most umbrageous fig and walnut trees. The long, low house looked a very inviting place, with its broad piazzas festooned with a variety of exquisite creeping plants, and deeply shaded to the west by an enormous live-oak, whose vicinity had been especially considered when the house was built.

The tree had flourished there generations before an American had set foot in the valley ; when the Musgrove Ranch had been a sheep-walk, and Mexican shepherds had camped many and many a time under the dark, wide-spreading branches. Now, in its old age, it had a lordly carpet of blue grass spread about its feet, with groups of snow-white lilies and vivid geraniums brightening its solemn shade. There were garden seats, too, looking very modern under the gnarled old branches, and here the Musgrove family were seated this evening, as was their wont.

The family consisted of Mrs. Musgrove, the widowed mother, two handsome, sunburned men, her sons, and a slender, dark-eyed daughter.

"It is too bad, Bruce, that you could not find time to drive over to the station," the mother said, looking for the hundredth time along the road leading southward to the distant railway station ; "the poor girl will feel disappointed to have none of her cousins come to meet her. It seems to me that one or the other of you might have gone."

"Quite impossible, mother ; at least for me. I cannot get a day's work out of the men unless I am with them, and you know we are irri-

gating the upper olive-patch. Hugh, there, might have gone, if he had chosen, as well as Sandy."

Hugh shrugged his broad shoulders, and declared that he felt too bashful to face his New York cousin alone, and that Nettie had been too lazy to go with him.

"You know, mother, I could not go in the scorching sun," exclaimed the young girl in an injured tone. "Hugh is always ready to blame me for his shortcomings."

Hugh laughed, and threw an acorn, which had just fallen from the branch above him, into his sister's hair.

"I wonder what she will be like!" he said, ignoring Nettie's attempt to retaliate. "If she is like uncle Percy with his overbearing ways, I shall have nothing to do with her."

"Hush, Hugh," said Mrs. Musgrove; "you have no respect for anything."

"Isn't that the phaeton?" said Nettie, pointing to a small dark object in the straight road, which dwindled to a thread in the distance as it ran across the "unimproved" land southward.

"The phaeton or a Chinese mule-wagon," said Hugh solemnly as he pretended to scrutinize it. But Mrs. Musgrove, looking anxiously towards it, declared that she would walk as far as

the gates to meet the carriage, and Nettie, slipping her arm into her mother's, set out with her, while the two young men, with real or affected indifference, slowly rose and followed.

They were two stalwart, handsome fellows. Indeed, the Musgrove brothers were regarded by all the inhabitants of the valley as *par excellence* the first in all respects of the young men of that locality. At the first glance you would have thought them remarkably like each other, but, looking more narrowly, a marked difference was discernible. Bruce, the elder, was in every way the stronger of the two. There was more power in the handsome face as well as in the firmly knit frame, but there was a lack of the careless grace and the genial attraction of the younger brother.

Walking leisurely along, stopping every now and again to note the condition of some particular tree, or the need of attending to some newly set out sapling, or to turn a faucet which let a copious stream of water refresh some thirsty plant, the young men reached the gates in the fence which marked the southern boundary of the ranch.

A group of magnificent pepper-trees stood near the gates, and on a seat beneath them they found their mother and sister.

The phaeton was now a clearly defined object, and a feeling of expectancy made the four persons silent for the next ten minutes.

Mrs. Musgrove was the one most moved by the thought of meeting her niece. It was not merely the remembrance of having held her in her arms as a little child which quickened her pulses and brought tears into her eyes, but it was the sudden, vivid image of the old Eastern homestead, not seen for so many years, and of the beloved ones of her youth and early womanhood, so many of whom had passed away from earth without a farewell. The young men both felt a greater interest than they would have confessed, and Nettie's brightening eyes and flushed cheeks showed that her cousin's advent was certainly not a matter of indifference.

At last the wheels sounded distinctly on the sun-baked road, and in a few moments more the carriage stopped. Bruce opened wide the gates, while Hugh hastened to help the traveler to alight.

A slender girl in a traveling dress of severe simplicity, and with a pale face much concealed by a gray veil—such was the first sight of Ada Selwyn which greeted the gaze of the Musgrove family.

She seemed to turn instinctively to the

mother, and in an instant Mrs. Musgrove held her very fondly in her arms, all the yearning tenderness for the old, far-off home expressing itself in the kiss which the older woman bestowed on her young relative.

"These are your cousins, my dear," she said, still half embracing her. "Bruce, my eldest son, Hugh, and Nettie."

"I am very glad to see you all," said the girl, looking from one to another, and giving her hand to each.

A pair of clear gray eyes seemed to take note of the three faces, and the voice was quiet and self-possessed.

Then, amid explanations and excuses from Mrs. Musgrove, the party turned towards the house, the carriage having been sent on with Miss Selwyn's luggage.

The arrival of an entirely new element in a household where there has been little or no change for years, is always epoch-making. I mean, of course, when the person newly added has a distinct individuality; and that such was the case with Ada Selwyn, each member of the Musgrove family was from the first more or less conscious.

When the evening was over, none of the family except Mrs. Musgrove had quite decided as

to whether the stranger cousin had impressed them favorably or otherwise : Bruce observing her from the standpoint of his unquestioned headship and superiority ; Hugh, from that of the admired and coveted cavalier of all the young ladies of his acquaintance ; Nettie, with somewhat of the feeling which makes many girls look at others as their possible rivals.

True, Nettie was without doubt a very pretty girl, and in that respect there could be no question of rivalry ; but there was a certain air of quiet, highbred *savoir vivre* in Ada Selwyn, the natural outcome of a youth spent in the centres of civilization and in a refined and intellectual companionship, which made itself felt and gave Nettie a sensation of uneasiness.

Ada was too tired from her long, fatiguing journey to do much more than answer her aunt's questions about old friends and places.

She was very thankful to have arrived in safety, very glad to see the aunt and cousins, her nearest of kin now, of whom she had heard and thought since she could remember anything, and yet naturally somewhat reserved, being practically among strangers.

It was still quite early when she succumbed to her weariness and asked to be excused.

"To-morrow, dear auntie," she said, "you

will find me I hope not quite so stupid, and better able to tell you all you want to know. No, please, you must not come with me. I know the way already."

And with a pleasant smile and general "good night" she vanished.

It had long since grown to be the blessed habit of Ada Selwyn's life to pour out her heart in prayer to the Almighty and All Merciful One. Shortcomings and sorrows and aspirations; intercessions for beloved ones and for all the sinning and the sad—all was brought before Him who can be touched with our infirmities. And to-night, kneeling by the snow-white, inviting bed in the pretty room which her aunt's affectionate care had prepared for her, meekly and simply, as a little child, she offered up her prayer and praise, then, with a grateful sense of His ever-present love, she laid her head upon the pillow and fell into a deep delicious slumber.

CHAPTER II.

FARM hands turning out for their day's work, a heavy team passing at a little distance, and the general stir which ushers in the day on a large ranch awoke Ada on the following morning, rested and refreshed. She lay for a few moments gathering up the threads of her last evening's experience, and realizing that she had entered upon a new chapter in her life.

The bustle had subsided, and in the comparative stillness that followed a mocking-bird on a tree close by burst forth into a very ecstasy of song. The sun had not yet risen, but the wonderful light of dawn lay on everything, when Ada leaned from her window and looked out upon her new world. She saw how matchless in their beauty were the mountains which, even as she looked, passed from solemn shadow into a pearly loveliness, and then, as the sun emerged from the Eastern hills, flushed into tints of amethyst and rose. She could not look away until the first glory had faded out and day had fairly asserted itself; then her eyes

wandered over the wide valley with its scattered ranches, some with goodly groves of fruit trees, others but just struggling into existence, and again great stretches of barren land, seamed here and there by the stony river-beds, now completely dry, but along whose banks some scattered sycamores or willows attested to the presence of water through a portion of the year. It was a relief to turn from that part of the prospect to the flourishing ranch immediately surrounding her. Everything, even to an experienced eye, evinced care and prosperity, and the spirit of order was as plainly visible as that a sense of the beautiful had had a large part in the planning and planting of the Musgrove Ranch.

The sight of Nettie in the simplest and freshest of morning gowns, with a large light basket of grain for her chickens, gave the finishing touch to the attractive scene, and Ada hastened to join her cousin, who greeted her affectionately.

"Do let me go with you to the chickens," said Ada ; "you do not know how I shall enjoy everything about your country life, which has the added charm here of perfect novelty."

Nettie laughed.

"I hope you will never get half as tired of it as I often am," she said. "I have wished

thousands of times that I could change places with you. The very name of New York has often made me envy you. Only think of my never having even seen San Francisco since I was a child !”

Her cousin looked at her reflectively. “How strange it is that people are so seldom satisfied with their lot! I, on the other hand, would sometimes willingly have changed places with you—or, rather, I often wished to be here with you all. From the descriptions I had read, Southern California seemed a kind of Eldorado, and I have always had a great desire to travel, which has seldom been gratified. Then there was the great attraction of seeing you all face to face.”

“Well, I am sure we were all delighted when we heard you were really coming,” said Nettie, graciously. “And now that you are here, I hope you won’t be dreadfully disappointed with us all.” She looked so pretty and so pleasant that Ada involuntarily answered by a kiss, which Nettie accepted as a tribute to her attractions, and which made her feel still more cordially disposed to her cousin.

Together they fed the chickens and gathered some flowers ; the beauty and profusion of the latter drew many exclamations of delight from

Ada. Then turning towards the house, they met Bruce coming in quest of them.

"I am glad to see that Cousin Ada can get up early," he said, holding out a strong, brown hand, which formed an almost amusing contrast in size and color to hers. "Life would not be worth living here without the morning hours. What do you think of our ranch?" he asked, with a slight gesture of his hand which seemed to denote conscious ownership. "How does it look to Eastern eyes?"

"I have been studying it from my window," she replied, "and I cannot tell you how much I admire it. It must be the result of so much energy and patience, and it shows such a sense of fitness and beauty."

Bruce felt himself color to the roots of his hair with gratification. Ada had spoken with such conviction, and the praise of his ranch was almost as sweet to Bruce as the praise of a child is to its mother. Ambition was almost a passion in this young man, and the circumstances of his life seemed to have denied it any other channel. To be owner of the most extensive and successful ranch of the Hermosa Valley had been his main object in life, since his father's death had left him, a mere stripling, head of his family.

"You must not praise Bruce too much," said Nettie, mischievously; "it does not agree with him. He might come, in time, to believe himself Emperor of California, or some such thing. We are all dreadfully afraid of him as it is."

"It was not Bruce, but the ranch which I was praising," laughed Ada. "Are they supposed to be one and the same?"

"Yes, you will soon find that out; I have given up thinking of them separately."

Nettie did not often venture to tease her elder brother, of whom she was quite right in saying that his family stood somewhat in awe, but she felt just now that Ada's presence was a safeguard. He did not condescend to reply, but, addressing Ada, proposed that she should take a drive after breakfast. "I have kept myself disengaged this morning, thinking that you might like a drive round the place, that is if you are rested;" and Ada gladly acquiesced.

It was the prettiest breakfast-table, Ada thought, that she had ever seen. The snowy linen and Mrs. Musgrove's beloved old family china were set off by the most delicious and fragrant fruit and flowers, not to speak of the abundant and excellently prepared substantials of the meal.

But there was one thing which jarred strange-

ly upon the new member of the household. She had never, as far back as she could remember, sat down at a family board at which no blessing had been asked from the Giver of all good. It was evident, however, that such was not the custom here. Ada stood hesitating for a moment, and Mrs. Musgrove, misunderstanding her questioning look, pointed to a seat beside her.

"I am going to have my new daughter at my right hand," she said affectionately, "and Nettie at my left."

Ada bent her head and sent up silently the brief prayer which she had been taught as a child.

"I thought of taking the double-seated carriage and all going together," said Mrs. Musgrove, when Ada mentioned the intended drive, "but Bruce's horse, Aleppo, is a splendid creature, and you would enjoy a ride behind him more—that is, my dear, if you are not easily frightened. Bruce tells me he has no ugly tricks, but I confess that I have not the nerve to drive with him."

"The fact is, mother is only happy when she is driving in her old buggy, with a horse that has been past work these ten years," said Hugh, in good-natured mockery. "I only hope she

won't want to treat you very often to her own special comfort—three miles an hour at his best—with Ichabod !”

“Only think, my dear, Hugh insists on calling my poor old Billy *Ichabod*, which means, I believe, that his glory has departed. Well, any how, he is a great comfort to me !”

Ada could not help laughing too.

“Well, Auntie, I shall look forward to many a cosy chat with you, in company with Billy, and I am very fond of old horses, so shall not speak disrespectfully of the poor fellow.”

“I hope you won't despise Aleppo on account of his youth,” said Bruce.

“No, indeed; but I must warn you that I am not such a strong-minded female as to be above fear.”

“There is no occasion for any. Come and look at him; I see Sandy has the buggy ready for us.”

Aleppo was certainly a magnificent creature, unsurpassed in the country for beauty of form and fleetness, and, though nervous and high-strung, as a thoroughbred is wont to be, yet quite under the control of his cool-headed and strong-handed master.

Ada was charmed with him. She patted his dark, glossy neck with the smallest and whitest

hand which the Musgrove Ranch had ever seen, and looked at him so affectionately and admiringly, that he stooped his stately head towards her, as if in recognition of her advances.

Ada will never forget her first drive in California. The morning was perfect. It was still so early that the heavy foliage of the trees was dripping with dew which had gathered on them through the night. The roads through the ranch were kept constantly watered, so that the dust, the great drawback to summer driving in Southern California, was kept completely under. Aleppo sniffed the morning breeze, as though enjoying it to the full, and almost flew, as it seemed to Ada, along the firm, smooth ways between ranks of eucalyptus, willows, and exquisite pepper-trees, which in places almost met overhead. On either hand extended groves of oranges, lemons, and almost every variety of fruit—everything in a perfect state of order and cultivation. Then, at the end of the long, green vistas, the mountains in their morning radiance were everywhere visible. The whole thing was so new and so beautiful, the perfume of the flowers, groups and beds of which seemed scattered everywhere, was so delightful, the glimpse of deep blue sky, and the shafts of golden sunlight so dazzling, that the city-bred,

Eastern girl who had, as it were, hitherto worshiped nature afar off, felt absolutely charmed.

Bruce Musgrove in his strong manhood, with his serious, clean-cut, handsome face, and the brown shapely hand upon the reins, made part of the enjoyment.

They did not speak much, but Bruce felt instinctively how greatly she enjoyed it ; and for him too the drive possessed a pleasure hitherto not experienced. He drove his cousin around to where his laborers were irrigating the fruit groves, and, in another place, were clearing an addition recently made to the ranch, and briefly and clearly explained everything she wished to understand.

Then, when they had made the entire circuit of the ranch, he turned Aleppo's head towards the mountains, and they drove over the dry, arid-looking plains, which gradually sloped upwards to the "foot-hills," or low spurs of the Sierras.

"We have a cañon yonder," he said, pointing to what looked like a black shadow on the mountain-side. "I must take you to see it some other time. To-day you shall just enjoy the view over the valley."

When they had reached the foot-hills even

Aleppo seemed disposed to rest for awhile, for he had scarcely slackened his great speed up the long incline. Bruce drove into the deep shade of a group of live-oaks and turned the horse's head southward.

"O, Bruce, how beautiful!" exclaimed Ada. "I am glad we did not once look back in driving up. You can scarcely imagine what this is to me."

"I think I can," he answered, with the half smile which she had already noticed.

The homeward drive seemed best of all, for Aleppo fairly outdid himself, as if to impress his magnificent qualities on the new member of the family. Bruce helped Ada to alight, then, springing into the buggy again, went to direct his men at their work. Hugh in his cool working costume was pruning trees, Nettie resting with a novel in a hammock.

CHAPTER III.

LIFE at the Musgrove Ranch speedily grew to have a fascination for Ada Selwyn. Novelty has a great charm to young minds, and the girl's nature was so sound and wholesome that the simple pleasures which her new home afforded were enjoyed with a zest which could not but be gratifying to her hosts. That first delightful drive with Bruce was followed by others, some with him alone, behind his fleet and fiery Aleppo, some in the family carriage, to one or another point of special attraction, or to visit friends whose homes lay, for the most part, at a considerable distance from the Musgrove Ranch.

These were generally very pleasant people who had brought with them, from their Eastern homes, the habits and amenities of social life, and who succeeded in getting a good deal of enjoyment out of a life which might otherwise have grown monotonous and narrowing. The young people had a tennis club, riding parties, and—best of all, Ada thought—occasional boat-

ing excursions, for the Pacific was not many miles distant.

The nearest town was a small and, it must be confessed, a very unattractive one, named Caliente. A few days after Ada arrived they drove through it on their way to a friend's ranch, and Ada was disagreeably impressed by the untidy dwellings, the uncared for streets, and the enormous proportion of saloons which flaunted their bold fronts at every corner.

As they drove rapidly through the place, Bruce, glancing at his cousin's face, saw a question there, before it had framed itself upon her lips.

"Where do you go to church?" she said. "I have thought each day of asking you, and yet have never done so."

She looked at Bruce as she spoke, and then something she could not decipher in his face made her look in turn at each of the others.

Just for a moment there was a curious, embarrassed silence. Bruce's lips wore a little sneering smile, Hugh laughed carelessly, Nettie became suddenly interested in buttoning her gloves, and Mrs. Musgrove colored quite painfully, as she answered:

"Well, really, my dear, I cannot say that of

late years we have gone to church at all. You see—”

“Not gone to church at all!” exclaimed Ada; and the unfeigned astonishment, not to say consternation, quite altered the character of her face. “I beg your pardon, dear auntie,” she went on hastily; “I did not realize that you might be out of reach of the services of the Church. Of course I ought to have been prepared for it, but yet I can hardly understand how—in all this valley—”

“We must not let you remain under a false impression,” said Bruce, and there was a harsh ring in his voice which was new to Ada; “Mother did not say there was no church to go to; she only said we did not go to it. I think you can see it from here. Do you see that place that looks like a barn, with a cross on the end, there, next to that tobacco shop?” and he pointed with his whip up a street at right angles from the one down which they were driving; “that, if I mistake not, is the Episcopal church of Caliente.”

There was a touch of mockery in his manner as he checked his horses in order to let Ada have a better view.

“Thank you,” she said, so quietly that one must have known her very well to have detect-

ed any pain in the tone ; "and have you a clergyman living here ?"

"Of that I am not so sure. There is another little town, Graceville, over yonder, about six miles, and I think I have heard that Mr. Ashleigh divides himself between the two places."

"Then you do not know when services are held here ?"

"I do not."

"Would you mind stopping for a moment to find out for me ?"

Bruce Musgrove could frown, and when he did so his face grew quite cold and harsh. Ada caught the look.

"I am sorry to trouble you," she said quietly, "but I must really know about the services."

"Get down, Hugh, and find out if you can," said Bruce; and Hugh sprang out with a quizical expression, and disappeared in the nearest store, while his brother first touched the horses with the whip and then checked them so suddenly as to rouse their indignation and make them very restive. Their master muttered a little angrily, otherwise the party sat quite silent until Hugh reappeared with a card in his fingers, which he presented with a low bow to his cousin. It contained a short, printed notice of the services of the Mission Chapel of

St. Stephen, Caliente. Missionary, the Rev. Eustace Ashleigh. Below were the words, "Lo, I am with you always."

"Thank you so much, Hugh," said Ada. She read the card, and then carefully placed it in her purse. It was only too evident that the matter was of no interest to the others.

Thus, in a point of the most vital interest to Ada, a discord had sprung up which marred the harmony of her new surroundings. True, she had had already, more than once, a sort of premonition that in her religious life she would not find the sympathy she had anticipated from her relatives, but she had not allowed herself to entertain the thought. There is often a peculiar reticence, especially in the young, in religious matters—a shamefacedness which prevents people from speaking to one another of what should be, and often *is*, of the deepest importance to themselves, and Ada had hoped, upon a longer acquaintance, to find that her cousins were in the main in accord with her. It was no small shock to one of her training and principles to find that there really existed a vast difference between them.

Had she been less self-possessed, it would have been almost impossible to refrain from some expression of regret or disappointment,

but the face she turned towards her aunt was just a trifle paler and less smiling, that was all. She saw, however, an expression of annoyance or distress in Mrs. Musgrove's kind eyes, which made her, by an effort, dispel her own. This was not the time or place to speak of what lay nearest to her heart.

"Auntie," she said, laying her little delicately gloved hand upon her arm, "when are you and I to have a quiet jaunt together with poor old Billy? These fiery steeds of Bruce's are not good for your nerves, I see."

"Have you seen Ichabod?" asked Hugh, before his mother could reply. "Do you think you will enjoy him?"

"Yes, I have visited the stables, and I think him a very respectful looking, nice old horse," said Ada, "and it is a sign of your lack of veneration, Hugh, that you should ridicule him."

A little good-natured banter soon put the shadow to flight which had come between Ada and her relatives. Bruce was the last to join in the renewed conversation.

As they drove out of the town, Ada noticed a small, rude house standing apart in a well-kept garden. A group of eucalyptus-trees shaded it from the western sun, and a veranda to the east was thickly covered with beautiful

climbing plants. Near a window opening upon it a young woman was sitting, or, rather, reclining, in a large easy-chair, and the head and shoulders of a man, stooping over a book, could be seen in the background. Ada was the only one of the party who noticed these objects, but the slight glimpse she had, as they passed rapidly, settled the question in her mind as to where the Rev. Eustace Ashleigh resided. She said nothing, but took good note of the locality, determining within herself that she would see it soon again and make acquaintance with the persons residing there.

The ranch to which Ada was introduced that day gave her another aspect of California. The house was large and handsome, and stood in a green island, as it were, surrounded, far as the eye could reach, by a sea of ripening grain. The land was gently undulating, and as the breeze which came direct from the ocean, not many miles distant, swept over the swaying, heavily eared wheat, the effect was beautiful in the extreme. To Ada the sight was strangely exhilarating. As they reached the top of a long incline from which the full view of that vast harvest broke upon her, the cloudless sky bending over it, an emblem of the boundless love of the great Father, the girl involuntarily

clasped her hands in a thrill of pure enjoyment.

“ It is a fine sight,” said Bruce appreciatively.

“ I like it best when the grain is cut,” said Nettie ; “ we have some splendid riding parties over these slopes.”

The immediate surroundings of the house were beautiful, full of verdure and flowers; and the warm welcome which the party received made a charming termination to the drive.

CHAPTER IV.

THE next day was Sunday, which was observed at the Musgrove Ranch as a day of rest and ease. Bruce Musgrove, as a practical man, was fully alive to the fact that one day in seven was absolutely needful in which to unbend from the daily strain of labor and care. His farm laborers were required to do nothing that was not absolutely needful, and such duties were to be taken in turn. With the exception of the cook and Mrs. Musgrove herself, the household indulged in a *dolce far niente*. Bruce, whose active mind and habits incapacitated him from enjoying such "sweet idleness" to the full, was the first up, and usually took a solitary stroll about his property before the late breakfast, at which Nettie and Hugh appeared. The Sunday meals were especially excellent. Mrs. Musgrove had come by degrees to feel that she was performing a sort of religious duty in devoting peculiar thought and care to the preparation of these Sunday repasts. The afternoon was mostly devoted to a drive or a visit,

the evenings by Nettie and Hugh to music, by Bruce to reading, chiefly scientific.

On this particular Sunday, Ada Selwyn's first at the ranch, Bruce was up even earlier than usual, but he was not the first to rise in the household. Ada had risen soon after the morning sunlight had crept through her curtains, and, not long afterwards, tapped gently at her aunt's door.

"Why, Ada, dear child, what is the matter?" said Mrs. Musgrove, who was meditating a short nap before rising.

"Nothing is the matter, Auntie," said the young girl, stooping to kiss her—and then, seating herself on the edge of the bed, she smoothed the soft, gray hair off the elder woman's forehead—"only I have come to ask a favor of you this morning."

"Anything in the world that I can do for you."

"I want you to lend me Billy and your own buggy, to drive to Caliente, to service."

The worried look that Ada had seen in her aunt's eyes the day before came back.

"My dear—really—of course you can have Billy—but it scarcely seems right that you should drive alone—and Billy is exceedingly slow. Now, if Bruce—"

"Don't trouble about Bruce, auntie, or about me! Billy will take me safely, and I am sure Hugh gives him a worse character than he deserves. I shall start early, so as to be sure of being in time."

"But you cannot go without your breakfast, child—"

"With your permission, I am going to the pantry, where I shall find all the breakfast I need."

"But are there any of the men about, to harness Billy for you? Really, Ada, I cannot quite approve—"

"O yes, you can, you dear, good auntie, and some time—soon—who knows?—you will drive with me to church."

"Ah, well, Ada; the time was when I felt just as you do, but the circumstances of my life have been such—but—there—I do not mean that. I cannot really excuse myself."

The color had risen slowly in her face while speaking, and Ada, who at the first moment of their meeting loved her gentle-natured aunt very dearly, laid her soft cheek beside hers.

"Dear Auntie, we will speak of it another time. I love you so well that you will not mind my speaking of what is in my heart."

Mrs. Musgrove's eyes filled with tears, and she stroked Ada's hand tenderly.

"And now I am going to hunt up Sandy, or some one, and if I don't find them I shall try my hand at harnessing Billy myself."

She smiled gaily, kissed her aunt good-bye, and was gone.

Sandy was a grim-looking old Scotchman, who had been in the Musgrove family before Bruce was born ; cross-grained enough at times, but true as steel. Sandy was a Scotch Presbyterian, and traveled once a month full twenty miles to attend service at the nearest Presbyterian church. He had a deep-seated prejudice against the "Prelatists," as he would have called the Episcopalians, and, therefore, though a strict Sabbatarian himself, looked upon the lax observance of the day in the family which he had served so long, as scarcely less objectionable than their attending their own worship. Sandy was gently whistling an ancient psalm-tune to himself as he entered the stable-yard, when he was almost surprised out of himself by the sight of Ada Selwyn. He stopped his whistling and took off his weather-stained old cap as she came up to him, looking so fresh and fair in her sweet dignity.

"Good morning, Sandy."

"Good morning, ma'am."

"I want you, if you please, to harness Billy to Mrs. Musgrove's buggy for me. I am going to drive to Caliente."

"By yourself, ma'am?"

"Yes, Sandy; I am quite a good driver."

A slow smile rose to Sandy's lips.

"You had need to be, ma'am, if you are going to drive Billy. Hadn't I better put in Charlie, Miss Nettie's horse? He is a good traveler—or, maybe, Master Bruce—"

"No, thank you, Sandy, I would rather have Billy—I can take my time."

So Sandy, revolving the matter much in his own mind, harnessed Billy, and having taken care to supply Ada with a good whip, and held the horse, for form's sake, while she stepped into the somewhat time-worn vehicle, stood aside to witness the departure.

As Ada gathered up the reins, she chanced to see Bruce sauntering along the drive towards the gates, where she would have to pass him. The sneering smile with which he had pointed out the church at Caliente recurred to her with a pain which surprised herself, and she shrank from exposing herself to such another. There was no help for it, however, so she touched Billy with the whip in such a manner as to make him

aware that another than his indulgent mistress was driving him at this unwonted hour; and the indignation which he doubtless felt resulted in his setting out at a pace which filled Sandy with surprise.

Bruce, sauntering on, his head bent in thought, heard the sound of horses' feet and of wheels behind him, and had scarcely time to feel surprised when Billy passed him at a rapid trot, and Ada Selwyn, with an unwonted flush upon her cheeks, nodded and smiled at him as he stepped aside.

"Haven't I a fast horse?" she called out, good-humoredly, as she went by.

Bruce stood looking after her with a curious mixture of expression; annoyance speedily got the upper hand.

"Absurd!" he muttered to himself, as he turned upon his heel; "these self-righteous people are very clever in devices for rebuking the sinners round them, but, Miss Ada, you will find that I am not disposed to put up with this sort of thing."

"How cross you look, Bruce," said Nettie at breakfast. "I thought Ada was making you quite good-humored. Is it because she is late this morning?"

"On the contrary, she was early," replied Bruce, coldly. I had the pleasure of seeing

her drive off in state in mother's buggy with Ichabod ; I presume on her way to her devotions at Caliente. Do you know anything about it, mother ?”

Poor Mrs. Musgrove looked uneasy. She stood in awe of her strong-willed, energetic son, and especially dreaded his irony.

It had been so much easier to give way to him than to assert her authority, even in his childhood, that by degrees she had lost it altogether, and their relative positions seemed sometimes reversed.

“Yes, Ada came to me this morning,” she replied ; “I advised her not to take Billy, but I could not refuse him, as she really wished to go.”

“The whole thing is ridiculous,” said Bruce, sharply. “For my part, I object to any of our family making themselves conspicuously absurd.”

“Well,” said Hugh, whose lighter and easier disposition seldom quite sympathized with his brother, and whose good-natured gallantry was somewhat shocked at Bruce's harshness of manner—“well, I must say, Bruce, that I don't see why you should make a disagreeable fuss over it. I wish Ada had spoken to me last evening. I should have strained a point to get up early and drive her over myself.”

"And attended service, I presume," said Bruce, ill-naturedly.

"Well, for that matter, I have not taken a vow never to go to church, that I know of."

"That may be, but if you had any self-respect you would not be likely to go to a church whose minister had insulted your brother."

"You make too much of that, Bruce," said Mrs. Musgrove wondering at her own courage. "I cannot think that Mr. Ashleigh intended to insult you; and, after all, people don't always attend church for the clergyman's sake."

Bruce's only reply was an impatient frown, and the meal would have been an unusually uncomfortable one, had not Nettie, who had an object in restoring her brother's good-humor, gone out of her way to do so.

"I wish you would drive me over to the Croftons this afternoon, Bruce," she said meekly, as she helped him to some dish which was supposed to be his favorite one. "I almost promised Louise that you would." And after some demur Bruce consented.

CHAPTER V.

ONCE beyond the precincts of the ranch, Ada found that Billy soon subsided into the jog-trot which was his ordinary gait. The white, dusty road stretched away over the arid upland, so dry and parched after the long, rainless summer. The morning was not very warm, for some misty clouds hung like fleeces overhead, and subdued the fervent rays of the sun.

The Musgrove Ranch was the last on that side of the settlement, and there was not another upon the road to Caliente, until within a short distance of that place. It certainly was a lonely road, and Ada felt a light nervous thrill pass over her as she looked over the five or six miles before her. Billy gave her a sense of helplessness. Just as a little feeling of discouragement came upon her, from among the dead, dried mustard bordering the road, a bird's song of peculiar sweetness and clearness struck upon her ear. It was the sweetest and simplest of California singers, the field-lark, whose few tender notes, be they repeated never so often,

cannot lose their charm. There was something so home-like and cheering in the sound that Ada drove on with a lighter heart. "I don't want to whip you, poor old Billy," she said, cheerfully, "but you must try to do your best this morning," and she drew the whip lightly over his sleek and well-fed back. Either the gentle remonstrance or the reminder exercised a salutary effect, and the old horse started out again at a respectable trot, which he kept up with sundry intermissions until the first houses of Caliente came in sight. There was still a long, though gradual, ascent before the little town was reached, and Ada's patience was well tested before at last she found herself in the streets of Caliente.

There was no appearance of its being Sunday. Many of the shops were open, and men were lounging round or passing in and out of the "saloons" as Ada drove along. Some looked at her curiously, with the quick perception that she was a stranger which people in small communities generally possess.

It was a trial, to a delicately reared and sensitive girl, to feel herself gazed at and commented upon by these idlers, many of whom, even at this early hour, were under the influence of liquor. It was the first time in her life that

attending the services of the Church had been connected with the slightest difficulty or self-sacrifice, and for that reason they assumed the more serious proportions.

"Yet, what a little thing to do for *Him!*" she murmured to herself, remembering what the early Christians had done—taking their lives in their hands, rather than forsake the assembling of themselves together.

So she drove on until, at the intersection of the streets where they had stopped the day before, she saw the barn-like little building, with the cross at the end, which Bruce had pointed out to her as the Episcopal church at Caliente.

On approaching it, she found a rail for fastening horses, and seeing a small boy sitting on the door-steps, she confided Billy to his care.

It was with a strange emotion that Ada crossed the threshold of the church. She had never worshiped in any save a city church, or, at least, one of dignified proportions and accessories. For years past she had attended one of the most beautiful and imposing churches of New York. Three weeks before, she had been one of a throng of worshipers in that stately building, and had joined her voice with those

which blended in glorious harmony of prayer and praise. She had then knelt for the last time before the sanctuary which faithful hearts and hands had rendered as worthy as earthly worship can be of the most sacred rites.

What she saw before her now was a small, absolutely plain, but decent building; the walls were not plastered, but the wood had been stained a dark rich tint, and the narrow lancet windows were filled with an opaque, greenish glass, which let in a subdued light, giving a solemn character to the building. The chancel was not recessed, but well raised above the body of the church. There were hangings of a rich crimson color, and an altar-cloth of pure white, on which was worked the emblem of our salvation; and two plain vases, filled with exquisite roses, stood on either side a metal altar-cross upon the table. The seats were made of ordinary redwood, unvarnished—so unlike the magnificent structures in which she had been wont to worship, and yet so absolutely alike in the feeling which it engendered, was this small house of God.

When Ada entered, the church was empty; with a feeling of profound thankfulness, a thrill of recognition, she knelt down and prayed. When she had risen from her knees, and had had

time to take a closer survey, she perceived how bare in its simplicity was the building, while at the same time no essentials were wanting—a small font, carved out of oak wood, an organ in a very primitive case, a prayer-desk and lectern of the plainest pattern. There was something in it all that appealed strongly to the young stranger. Her heart went out to the little church which was so churchly and so poor. A very feeble bell began to sound after awhile, and then a clergyman and a lady entered the church.

He was a man rather past middle life, with a fine, care-worn face; she was apparently considerably younger, and very fair and frail-looking. They walked up the aisle together, and turned towards the organ, which he opened for his companion.

“I am afraid it will be too much for you to-day,” he said, gently. The low, tender tone came distinctly to Ada’s ear: they evidently thought themselves alone.

“No, I am feeling rather better,” she said, “and it would be such a pity to have no music.”

Ada moved, and, looking up, they saw her. She arose as the clergyman approached her, and introduced herself. He looked surprised and interested.

"You are staying at the Musgrove Ranch?" he said, very kindly; "I am all the more happy to welcome you to our little church. My name is Ashleigh. I should like to introduce you to my wife before service."

Seeing the lady quite near, she was even more frail and fair than Ada had supposed. Her eyes were large and blue, and far too brilliant, and the delicate cheek had a feverish flush upon it. The girl's heart ached as she saw her, with a sudden memory of a beloved lost friend.

"Will you let me play for you to-day?" she said, after a few words had passed between them. "I heard Mr. Ashleigh say you were not well, and I should like to be of some use, if I may."

Mrs. Ashleigh looked at her with such sweet gratitude.

"How good and kind you are! I cannot refuse, and my husband will feel so grateful. He is worried to think of my having to play always."

So they went to the organ, and Ada, with a few touches, showed that church-music was to her almost as familiar as breathing. She glanced rapidly over the music which had been selected, and praised the tone of the little organ.

Then people began to drop in, until a small congregation had gathered, consisting chiefly of women. Ada looked for some of the Musgrove friends whom she had already met, but it was not until service had begun that one or two members of some of these families came in. Sitting where she did, she could not but notice the congregation—could not but see, with a feeling of chill and disappointment, how few joined heartily in the service, and hear how meagre were the responses. A few young girls composed the choir, and in singing the simple chants, were entirely alone. Ada made the most of the organ. The hymns were bright, and should have been familiar, and something like congregational singing should have been the result.

The sermon was not long. The preacher was intensely in earnest: fearless in his denunciation of the terrible indifference to religion, which he called the plague-spot of the land; tender and loving in his appeals to his hearers to show in their own lives and conduct an example which must eventually leaven the mass of irreligion and deadness to spiritual things around them; strong and distinct in doctrine, a firm adherence to which, he said, was the one

safeguard against the laxity that, of necessity, must lead to utter unbelief.

“Remember,” he said, “that we must either be influenced by or influence our surroundings. Either we make them better, or they make us worse. So surely as you hear me to-day, you will yourselves lapse into that life of practical unbelief, or the land in which you live will be lifted to a higher level by your presence in it.”

From that short sermon Ada learned enough of the religious conditions of her new home to make her put up a voiceless prayer for grace and strength to be faithful—faithful to the beautiful training of her youth—faithful to her Christian vows—faithful in life and in death to Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

CHAPTER VI.

SERVICE was over, but Ada remained to have a little further talk with her new friends, for she felt instinctively that such they were. They, on the other hand, had experienced a greater satisfaction in seeing her than she could have dreamed of. She could not have known that her sweet, pure face, her gracious helpfulness, her reverent demeanor, her clear, cultured voice which had responded with such distinctness in the service, had given the clergyman and his wife the greatest pleasure which they had known since Providence had led them to take up their abode at Caliente.

"My husband will drive you through the town, at least," said Mrs. Ashleigh, as the clergyman helped Ada into her carriage, and, in spite of her protest, laughingly insisted on taking his seat beside her.

"I am sure you will not deny my wife the satisfaction of knowing that I have piloted you past the saloons," he said, "and it will be nothing to me to walk back."

"But Mrs. Ashleigh will have to walk home alone!"

"No, she will wait for me here," he said, as he touched Billy with the whip, authoritatively. So Ada had to submit with a good grace, and waved her hand in farewell to Mrs. Ashleigh.

It was a comfort, there was no denying it, not to have to return alone through the streets of Caliente, for the idlers round the saloons had increased in numbers since morning.

"You are shocked, are you not," said Mr. Ashley, "at seeing the way in which Sunday is observed here? and well you may be. The need is great of faithful, patient workers, of strong and loving hearts to witness for our Lord, in this new and, in many ways, wonderful country."

"Yes," the young girl answered, with a sigh, as she thought of the sneering indifference of her cousins; "I am shocked and disappointed, but, Mr. Ashleigh, I want to do what I can to help forward the work for Christ and His Church. You must tell me what I can do, and I shall feel very grateful to you."

"My dear Miss Selwyn, I could wish for no stronger proof of your sincerity than the fact of your having attended our service this morning, though a visitor at the Musgrove Ranch. I

am, unhappily, too well aware of the position which your cousins occupy towards the Church. You may not yourself be fully acquainted with it, but I can vouch for it that you did not meet with much encouragement to come to Caliente to-day?"

Mr. Ashley said this with a patient, good-humored smile.

"No," said Ada, and she could not smile in return, "I did not, but there was certainly not sufficient opposition to make my coming the smallest merit on my part."

The clergyman looked at the grave young face with increasing interest. "I think I had better tell you," he said, "that I was so unfortunate as to incur the special disfavor of Mr. Bruce Musgrove. My zeal on one occasion perhaps outstripped my discretion, or, rather, knowing the family antecedents, I took for granted that I should find in the Musgroves some of the support I sorely needed. I had an interview with your cousin, in which he showed an amount of indifference that startled me out of my propriety, and I told the young gentleman, perhaps in too unvarnished a manner, what I thought of his attitude towards Christianity, and his responsibility as one of the wealthiest and largest land-owners in the set-

tlement. The result was that he lost his temper, and expressed, not very politely, his desire that I should not in the future consider it my duty to include the Musgrove Ranch in my pastoral visits. Of course, none of the family has ever entered my little church, and, of course, their example has done much to weaken my influence in the valley." He stopped, and sighed involuntarily.

"I am so grieved," said Ada, simply, "and it is all such a miserable surprise to me."

"I can see plainly the position in which you are placed," said Mr. Ashleigh; "I can see, too, how the fact of your loyalty to the Church will be added to the account against myself; but we must both remember that personal considerations ought not to weigh for a moment against higher motives. You and I have both a work to do for the Master. The way of kindness and gentleness is best; you will adhere to that, I am sure, and who knows how much you may accomplish!"

They had driven quite beyond the little town, and Mr. Ashleigh took leave of Ada, expressing the hope which he strongly felt that she might be able to come to Caliente again soon.

Billy, revolving in his mind the comforts of home, traveled far better than might have

been expected, but Ada had ample leisure to reflect on her conversation with the clergyman, and on the unexpected circumstances which had arisen to mar the happiness of her life at the Musgrove Ranch.

The luncheon hour was past when she reached home. The house had a somewhat deserted look, Bruce having fulfilled his promise to take Nettie to the Croftons, and Hugh ridden with a friend to the Cañon. Mrs. Musgrove was lying down with a headache, the result of the little worry which Bruce had occasioned her.

Ada drove round to the stables and then walked to the house ; she was tired, and felt it rather a relief not to have to face her cousins, Bruce especially.

It *did* feel a little lonely through the afternoon. Mrs. Musgrove *was* asleep, and the young people did not return till near night-fall. There was a deep stillness everywhere ; the farm-laborers were all away, and none of the accustomed busy life on the ranch was visible.

Ada sat for a long time under the great "live-oak," many thoughts crowding in upon her. For the first time in her life she recognized the fact that she might be called upon to suffer something for her Christian principles, but the

thought was not disheartening. A voice came to her in the stillness, as it has come to many another: "But if ye suffer for righteousness sake, happy are ye."

The sunset was beautiful beyond description; the lights and shadows on the mountains were wonderful in their varying loveliness. Ada watched them until the rosy tints had faded out and given place to a chill, gray hue which reminded her of death; then in the darkening sky stars came out here and there. The wind freshened until it blew coldly. As she turned to go into the house, she came on Bruce standing on the veranda; he had returned with Nettie a little while since.

Ada held out her hand to him.

"I am glad you have come back, Bruce," she said, frankly and sweetly: "I was beginning to feel a little forsaken. Where have you been all day?"

He had intended treating her distantly and coldly, to make her realize that she had displeased him, but it was hardly possible to do so in the face of so much gentleness. He contented himself, for the present, with preserving an absolute silence with regard to her drive to Caliente.

CHAPTER VII.

"A PICNIC in the Cañon!" exclaimed Nettie as she glanced over a letter which Hugh had just thrown into the hammock where she was reclining.

Ada and Bruce were having a game of chess on the veranda near by. Chess was Bruce's favorite recreation, if, indeed, what was entered into so seriously could be called such.

"Do you hear, Hugh? The Croftons, the Watkinses, the Hamingtons, and ourselves, on Thursday. We shall have to ride, for no carriage can pass along the road to the upper falls. Mammie," and she turned coaxingly towards her mother, "you will get Katie to bake us some of her best chicken-pies, will you not? A picnic in the Cañon is just what I seem to want!"

Ada looked up and laughed.

"You happy girl," she said, "to get just what you want."

"Don't mind her, Ada," said Bruce, severely; "do you see the position of your bishops?"

"Well, I declare, Bruce!" pouted Nellie; "you

are the most uncomfortable creature that I know. Wait," she added, mischievously; see if I don't tell Louise Crofton how you treated her invitation !"

"Don't interrupt our game, if you please," he replied without looking up, but Ada noticed that he colored and frowned a little. Women are quick to notice such trifles.

Bruce had only that day made the discovery that Ada was a good chess player ; so good, in fact, that it took all his skill to continue a game which was begun, on his part, with a little contemptuous carelessness of his opponent. He had never before played with a lady, and had rashly concluded that they were generally poor players.

Ada, seeing how much he was in earnest, began, on her part, to play with a stronger desire to conquer him ; and so the game went on, while Hugh and Nettie agreed that chess was the most unsociable and undesirable amusement (so called) that had ever been invented. Hugh was himself no mean player, when he gave his mind to it, but he did not approve of the masterful manner in which his brother had monopolized Ada.

"Checkmate !"

It was Ada's voice, with just the faintest quiver

of excitement in it, and Bruce threw back his hair from his forehead with a gesture which those who knew him best knew to signify annoyance.

"Yes, I have seen for some time that it was coming," he said ; "I must own to a very careless play at first."

It was Ada's turn to redden now.

"You might have left me my poor little victory," she said, half laughingly, half seriously ; "it would have been more generous."

"You would not want me to be generous if you mean that I should have played as with an inferior player," he said, almost crossly, "but, if it is any satisfaction to you, I will own that when we began I did not entertain the same respect for you as an opponent that I do now."

"Ah, you prejudged my case !" she replied, laughing good-humoredly.

"Well, I suppose I should feel flattered at your confession. You shall have your revenge when you will."

"Not to-day," said Hugh. "I protest. Bruce takes pleasure too sadly, as the Frenchman said of the Englishman. I want to show you the Night-blooming Cereus I told you about, Ada. The buds seem quite ready to open to-

night, and he offered her his arm with ostentatious gallantry.

"Auntie, you must come too," said Ada, who thought she saw a tendency in her cousins sometimes to be lacking in attention to their mother. "I shall not enjoy my walk half as well without you." And Mrs. Musgrove was very well pleased to go with the young people.

Nettie, anxious to discuss the picnic, followed, while Bruce, lighting a cigar, strolled to and fro on the piazza.

He did not like being conquered in anything, and it took him a few minutes to get over the little matter of Ada's victory. Strange to say, it was the fact of its being Ada's which made it more important than it would otherwise have been.

Why was it so? She was habitually gentle in manner, a lady always, with a grace which can only come from good breeding, and yet, under all this Bruce had detected from the first a strength of character and purpose which on the one hand attracted and on the other irritated him.

His whole bringing up had, unfortunately, tended to develop and strengthen what was arbitrary in his nature, until he had really

become something of an autocrat—always deferred to in his home circle, and even to a great extent beyond it, as men of strong mind and strong will are apt to be. And in this placid, gracious young cousin he instinctively felt there was a spirit which would not be controlled by his.

Again, like many and many a young man of promise in this great Western world, with its avenues to riches and success, with so much to foster worldly ambition and enterprise, with such rich spoils for the eager brain and strong hand, Bruce Musgrove had come by degrees to centre his hopes and desires upon purely worldly objects. The spiritual part of him, with all its glorious possibilities had become, if not dwarfed, at least dulled and deadened. Its needs had been denied until they no longer asked to be satisfied. And there had been nothing about him in any way to awaken a sense of the loss he had sustained. With the one exception, indeed, of Mr. Ashleigh, no one had ever pointedly addressed him on the subject of his religious obligations, and he had then arrived at a standpoint from which such interference had seemed unwarrantable presumption.

And here was Ada Selwyn, evidently belonging to another world, in respect to those things

which he had gradually come to regard with supercilious contempt, and yet a person of such culture and strength of character that it was impossible to despise her mental position.

So Bruce, when he reflected on his cousin, found himself in an uncomfortable condition of mind.

He was annoyed with himself this evening for allowing his reflections on Ada to engross him, and in a little while he set out on a brisk walk to a laborer's cottage to make arrangements for irrigating a new portion of the ranch on the morrow.

Meanwhile the others had visited the Night-blooming Cereus, and finding that it was on the very verge of opening, Ada had declared that she must wait to see it, and Hugh had hastened back to the house for wraps for the ladies.

The sunset came and faded while they waited, and then Ada witnessed for the first time the magical unfolding of the mysterious flower. The heavy perfume had a strange effect upon her.

"How wonderful, how marvelous," she said, watching the opening blossom; "ah, how can any one looking even at this, doubt that the hand of a great Creator fashioned this glorious world!" The others were silent, but Mrs. Musgrove pressed her niece's hand, as though her words awakened an answering feeling.

Bruce joined them as they were about to return to the house ; the first fresh glory of the flower had already passed away.

" Ah, Bruce, you have missed the loveliest sight ! " exclaimed Ada, " though, of course, it is not new to you."

But Bruce was cold and irresponsible. " Yes, I have often seen them," he said. " As a boy they had quite a fascination for me, but I seldom watch them now."

" Bruce is too practical to spend his time on night-blooming flowers," said Nettie, who had not forgiven her brother for his last " snubbing," as she called it ; " ' time is money ' is his motto. He is a true American grafted on a canny Scotchman ! "

Bruce never gave his sister the faintest reason to suppose that her little speeches affected him, and Ada could not but admire his absolute self-control in this matter, for Nettie seemed to delight in little irritating sallies when she could indulge in them with impunity.

" Are you going to this picnic, Bruce ? " asked Ada, who had fallen into the habit of changing the conversation when Nettie delivered her shots ; " you told me you would take me to the Cañon some time."

CHAPTER VIII.

A BRIGHT, breezy day added to the enjoyment of the picnic party, which had gathered at the Musgrove Ranch, and they set out in high spirits. All were on horseback except Bruce and Ada; the latter not having a riding-horse, her cousin of course volunteered to drive Aleppo in his buggy. Ada had, it is true, demurred at this; it was to have been a riding expedition, and it seemed to her that the young ladies of the party might feel a little aggrieved in being deprived of Bruce as a cavalier. She had even proposed, though not without misgivings, that she should be permitted to ride Billy, but this was met with so much good-natured derision, that she consented to Bruce's arrangement.

She had scarcely been alone with him since her conversation with Mr. Ashleigh had made plain to her the relation which Bruce occupied towards the clergyman and his work.

Bruce had interested and attracted her more than either of her cousins. His manliness, his energy, the ambition which had already given

him the first position among the inhabitants of the valley, even the reticence, which, contrasted with Hugh's habitual light-heartedness and Nettie's somewhat shallow manner, had combined to make her enjoy his society, and arrive, rather hastily, at a conception of his character which was too favorable. Ada's weakness — and which of us is without a weakness? — was a tendency to jump to conclusions. She had been proportionately disappointed at Bruce's almost contemptuous reference to the church at Caliente, and Mr. Ashleigh's account of the young man's course of action had grieved and shocked her the more because of the high opinion she had entertained of him.

Aleppo seemed excited to distinguish himself by the presence of the gay riders, and dashed on at such speed that Ada would have almost lost her nerve had she not placed great confidence in Bruce as a driver. It was exhilarating, and even exciting, to be whirled along, the fresh breeze blowing in her face, over the open valley towards the mountains, which she never wearied in watching.

The cousins had exchanged but a few words since setting out. Gradually they found themselves at a considerable distance in advance of the others, who, after the first brisk gallop, had

subsided into a pace suited to keeping up their merry conversation. The mouth of the Cañon, which was their destination, began to show like a black shadow on the mountain-side.

"I have no idea what a cañon is like," said Ada, as Aleppo began to slacken his speed on the steeper incline ; "is it very wild and weird ?"

"Wild enough, in some places," replied Bruce, "even to suit the greatest lover of romantic scenery, but there are some green and shady spots which you will enjoy. By the by, have you ever seen a rattlesnake ?"

"Never, except in a zoölogical collection," said Ada, with a little feminine shudder ; "I hope they are not plentiful in the Cañon !"

"You need not be alarmed ; a rattlesnake is not a difficult thing to kill. A home in Southern California would hardly be complete without a good collection of rattles. Has not Hugh shown you ours ?"

"No, Hugh has neglected my education in that respect."

"Well, we may be able to show you some fresh specimens to-day."

"You frighten me, Bruce," said Ada, who was really weak-minded in the matter of snakes ; "seriously, are we likely to see any ?"

Bruce turned his head and looked at his cousin curiously.

"It is almost refreshing to find that Miss Ada Selwyn has at least one weakness."

Ada laughed, a little flattered, and yet more than a little annoyed at Bruce's implied view of her character.

"I must be a very uncomfortable person for common mortals to live with," she said, "if I have only *one* weakness. I am afraid I could not quite enjoy being so near perfection."

"Well," said Bruce, as he gave Aleppo the faintest suggestion of the whip, "possibly there might be one other."

"That is comforting; what is it?"

"Perhaps the least, the very least, little tendency to like her own way."

He had not intended, even under cover of a joke, to hint at what had been in his mind ever since they had stopped that day at Caliente, but we sometimes find ourselves, against our will, giving expression to our thoughts.

"You always seem so much in earnest, Bruce; how have I shown it?"

They were not very far from the entrance to the Cañon, and Aleppo was walking leisurely enough.

"Well," said the young man slowly, and

looking straight before him as he spoke, "I gave you credit for so much good sense that I was surprised at your trip to Caliente on Sunday."

"Why, Bruce?"

Ada's heart was beating almost painfully, but she was not half-hearted.

Bruce laughed slightly.

"Why? because a drive of six miles across the valley with mother's old horse—and alone—seemed, to my judgment, not worthy of the admirable sense of my cousin Ada."

"I did not enjoy the drive at all," said she, calmly, "but I had no alternative, for I felt sure that neither you nor Hugh would wish to drive me there."

"That may be quite true," said Bruce, "and *there* comes in another question: you have not found us, I hope, in any way neglectful of your wishes or your comfort, since you came to us?"

"No, most certainly."

"Then—pardon me for saying so—might you not have supposed that we had some reason, at least worth considering, for not wishing you to attend church at Caliente?"

Ada kept silence for a few moments. "It did not seem to me that *any* reason, except the very gravest, could justify me in staying away

from the services of the church, if by any means I could get there."

The deliberation with which she spoke, the quiet conviction of her manner, as gentle as it was determined, had a curious effect upon her cousin. He had never, as far back as his memory had carried him, met with an opposition of the kind. His strong will and masterful manner had always, from a child, had their way with his surroundings. It was a new experience to be thus gently yet firmly opposed. The harsh look which Ada had seen before came into his face, robbing it of its comeliness.

"We have been brought up in different schools, it seems," he said, coldly; "my contact with nature, and my practical life, as well as some study of science, have turned my mind into another channel. Mediæval mummary is not my line."

"Neither is it mine," said Ada, still calmly, though her cheeks were beginning to brighten with a flush of excitement, "but I fail to see what mediæval mummary has to do with the services at Caliente. Nothing could be simpler than the one which I attended. And let me tell you, Bruce, that I was amply rewarded for my rather uncomfortable drive, by being able to take part in it. That little church, so poor and

unpretending, yet standing forth to witness for our Master, has touched my heart in a way that I cannot describe."

"Of course," said Bruce, with a sneer, "I make every allowance for a lady's sentiment."

Ada waited until she could control herself.

"You need make none for me, Bruce. I am not what would be called a sentimental person, and my love for the Church rests on a firmer basis, I hope, than mere sentiment."

"Call it the force of habit, then," said Bruce, harshly, "training, association, running in the old grooves, fear of hewing out fresh cisterns in place of the old time-worn channels, with their accumulation of rubbish."

The look with which Ada answered him photographed itself on Bruce's memory. It was a look the like of which he had never met before. There was so much sadness, so much pity, in it—a sort of yearning kindness—an almost imploring appeal. As their eyes met, the color rose slowly to his face, though it would have been impossible for him to explain the feeling which caused it to do so.

"Can it be, Bruce, that you are one of those who despise what the best and noblest and wisest of all the centuries since Christ have lived and died for? Have you, even without a

struggle, given up all for these new lights? Have you put science in the place of God?"

She scarcely knew what she had spoken. The thought was so intense that it had clothed itself in words of which she was almost unconscious; and he, for his part, had read in her face all that her words expressed.

He laughed a little uneasily.

"You are quite eloquent," he said, "but as I said before, I fear we are so far apart in our views and inclinations and studies, that there is little likelihood of our coming to an understanding. With regard to your visits to Caliente, I have of course no right to dictate to you; only this I must explain. Mr. Ashleigh, some time since, presumed in an unwarrantable manner to interfere with my freedom of action, and I consider myself fully justified in ignoring him. My family, of course, are with me, but as regards yourself, naturally I have no authority."

"I am glad, at least, that you have explained your position," she replied, "that we may understand each other in this matter. As for me, my duty, as a member of the Church, is so plain that were I to neglect it I should be acting against my conscience, and could not respect myself."

CHAPTER IX.

IT was strange and sad what a gulf seemed to have opened between the cousins. Ada was conscious of a more passionate feeling of indignation and pain than she had ever before experienced. Tears were near her eyes, and it was only by a great effort that she kept them back. As for Bruce, the unchecked pride of his nature, the tendency to domineer which his whole life had fostered, made his cousin's calm opposition to his wishes almost unbearable, the more so, because he was deeply conscious of her superiority.

He had made no reply to her last remark, except by a light, angry laugh, and they drove on in silence. Slowly the Cañon began to open before them ; the road ran between low walls of rock, among which the scrub-oak found here and there a footing ; now and then they drove for a short distance in deep shadow, cast by a projecting spur of the mountains, which were now gradually inclosing them.

As they advanced, the scene grew in wild-

ness and solemnity. Sheer walls of rock in some places, in others huge blocks piled on one another, like gigantic masonry, from the crevices in which a scrub-oak or stunted pine hung forward like a banner. Higher and higher grew the Cañon sides and the sky overhead looked a deep, awful blue. The silence and wild majesty of nature gradually stilled Ada's painful agitation. There was something which lifted her thoughts above earthly pains and troubles, and brought them nearer the peace of heaven. The angry look, too, passed out of Bruce's face. He was, in truth, scarcely less susceptible to the influences of nature than was Ada.

"Have you ever seen anything like this?" he asked after a while, turning towards her for a moment; and Ada, meeting his eyes, saw that for the time being there was a truce between them.

"Never," she answered; "I cannot tell you how it charms me."

"Some people are not fond of this wild solitude," he said; "it depresses them, but to me it has always been a keen enjoyment to feel myself in the very heart of nature."

"It is what I have always longed for," said Ada; "I have spent nearly all my life in cities,

or resorts which always seemed to me like an outgrowth of cities, and when I have read of places like this I have often felt impatient of the conventional enjoyments around me. I hope you will not think me too strong-minded," she added, laughing. It was a relief to be able to speak pleasantly to Bruce again.

"I shall be able to judge better of that when we meet our first rattlesnake," he answered grimly ; and Ada was subdued.

The unevenness of the road made progress slow, even with Aleppo, but none too slow for Ada, to whom every fresh combination of mountain and rock and chasm was a pleasure from which she was loath to part. Presently the profound silence was broken by the distant sound of water, and they came in sight of a silvery water-fall, spread like a veil over a precipitous rock and dashing itself into foam upon the débris at its base. It was gathered into a dark pool a little farther on, and then, overflowing its bounds, became a stream, murmuring over a stony bed and feeding a narrow belt of verdure along its sides. A group of sycamores stood near its margin, and here, at Ada's suggestion, they halted, and Bruce helped his cousin to alight. He spread a shawl for her under the trees and took Aleppo down to the water.

What an awful, utter solitude it seemed, when an angle of rock had hidden him from her sight ! Ada tried to fancy what it would have been had she not known that her cousin was within a couple of hundred yards of her, and had this seeming solitude been real.

She sat thus for some time, long enough to feel how small one human being is in such a scene ; then suddenly, just as Bruce, having returned and tied Aleppo to a projecting branch of a sycamore, had thrown himself down beside her, a burst of merry laughter was carried by the breeze to where they sat and the riding party came in sight, shouting and waving whips and handkerchiefs at view of the advance guard, as they called the cousins.

Foremost rode Hugh Musgrove with a very handsome, dark girl, who sat her horse most gracefully. She had been introduced to Ada as Miss Louise Crofton, but in the hurry of departure she had not realized her striking appearance.

"Are we to call a halt here," asked this fair amazon, addressing Bruce, "or do you propose waiting our return from the upper falls?"

There was just a faint touch of annoyance or satire in her voice which jarred on Ada, to whom it suddenly recurred that it had been

proposed that all should ride because the road to the upper falls was not practicable except on horseback.

"It would quite spoil this delightful day to me," she said, "if I prevented Bruce from going to the falls. I really ought not to have come, as I did not ride."

"Nonsense, Ada ; we wanted to show you the Cañon," said Bruce. "I know the upper falls by heart ; so we will wait here till they come back."

But Ada turned to Hugh.

"Will *you* stay with me, Hugh ?" she said ; "it seems scarcely fair that Bruce should be tied to my chariot-wheels *all* the time."

"A willing captive," laughed Miss Crofton.

"No doubt," said Ada, good-naturedly, but we must not impose even upon the most willing."

"I insist on staying with Ada," said Hugh, gallantly, dismounting as he spoke ; "I pledge myself to be her most devoted knight."

Bruce had already risen from his seat. He was not a man of many words, so no one was surprised at his vaulting onto Hugh's horse, and, while the others were laughing and chatting, quietly riding on beside Miss Crofton. The others, expressing their regret that Ada

and Hugh could not be of the company, followed, each turning to wave an adieu before disappearing behind the projecting rock.

A little silence fell after they were gone.

"It is too bad, Hugh," said Ada, turning to her cousin, "that I should have spoiled your ride."

Hugh laughed cheerily.

"You may rest assured, Ada, putting chivalry aside, that I feel I have made a good exchange. The fair Louise is not one of my especial favorites, perhaps because she is the *one* young lady who has the bad taste to snub me. The fact is, between ourselves, Bruce stands high in her graces, and she was scarcely civil to me as we rode along."

"Oh, you must not tell me anybody's secrets," said Ada, deprecatingly; and then she found herself wondering whether Miss Crofton was the sort of person likely to influence Bruce for good. She was about to ask a question, and then checked herself.

"What is it, Ada?" asked Hugh. "You have such a speaking face, that I know you were going to ask me something."

"I was going to ask you whether Miss Crofton was a member of the church, and then I hesitated because I feared that you might share

Bruce's views to the extent of not caring to speak about the church at all."

Hugh's handsome face wore a perplexed look for a moment.

"As regards Miss Crofton, I have an idea that she—well—that she does not go in for religion of any kind. As for not caring to speak of the church, to be candid with you, Ada, I know next to nothing about it."

He threw himself back upon the wild grass where they were sitting, and looked up at her with such honest eyes that Ada had a strange feeling of being much older—almost as though he had been a young, ignorant boy. He was, indeed, little else as regards religious teaching and impressions.

"You think me a very dreadful fellow, do you not?" he said.

"No," she replied, gently; "no, Hugh, I do not think you at all dreadful. I have every reason to think you the very opposite. But, Hugh"—she paused, and her clear gray eyes seemed to darken with the intensity of her feeling—"the more I like you, the more it grieves me that in the things which are to me the most sacred and the most dear, there should be no sympathy between us."

If any one had told Hugh that he would drift

into a religious conversation with his cousin, he would have been strongly tempted not to have risked a *tête à tête*, but it came about so naturally, she was so simple and so earnest, that he found himself, to his own amazement, listening to language which was absolutely new to him, on a subject to which—alas! that it must be said—he, in common with many and many another young man of the brightest worldly promise, had never devoted an hour's serious thought. It may have been that the solitude and solemn silence of the place gave added weight to the simple words of deepest meaning which fell from the young girl's lips.

"I cannot tell you, Hugh," tightly clasping her hands together in her eagerness—"I cannot tell you how much you lose by leaving religion, as I understand it, out of your lives. It seems to me, comparing great things with small, like robbing a flower of its perfume. Life is so much better with it, so much higher, and seems, indeed, so meaningless without it. Joys are made so much sweeter, and even pain—yes, even pain is made a blessing by it."

It is wonderful what influence young minds may exert over one another. It is doubtful if any older person, no matter how eloquent or how convincing, could have made quite the

same impression on Hugh's mind and feelings as did Ada in the unconscious earnestness of her youth. There came into his face a sort of dawning appreciation of her meaning.

"You have a way of recommending religion," he said, coloring as he spoke, "which makes me feel there must be something in it, but yet, to be honest with you, Ada, I, for my own part, have never felt the need of it. Does it seem strange to you?" he asked. "Why, you look as if you were sorry for me!" and he smiled, half amused, half touched, by the look of gentle pity in her face.

"Yes, Hugh, very sorry."

He laughed a little good-naturedly.

"Well, you must take us in hand ; not Bruce—I fear you would find him too unmanageable—but mother, poor mother, and Nettie, and your humble servant ; perhaps you can make something of us yet."

Ada smiled and sighed.

"You'll have to take yourself in hand, Hugh ; all that I ask of you is to promise me that you will not put these things away from you, as of no moment, but that you will at least spend a little time in thinking of them."

And Hugh promised.

CHAPTER X.

A SUDDEN, violent rearing motion of Aleppo, who had hitherto been contentedly lurching under the sycamores, startled Ada and her cousin. The latter sprang to his feet in a moment, and, before Ada had time to wonder, had darted forward to the excited animal and snatched the whip from its place in the buggy. Surely he was not going to punish the horse, thought Ada, with a woman's dread of seeing pain inflicted, but the next moment she saw what drove the blood from her cheek to her heart.

Some twenty paces distant, slowly drawing its shining length from a crevice in the rocks, and, even as Ada looked, raising its dreadful head, was an enormous rattlesnake. A cry of terror escaped her.

“O Hugh, Hugh, come back !”

But Hugh, without turning toward her, shook his left hand with a peremptory gesture, and, grasping the whip in his right, while keeping his eyes warily fixed upon the snake, took a

step or two in its direction. Ada felt faint with terror ; she turned away, and covered her face with her hands. It seemed to her that a long, dreadful time had passed, but in reality it was only a very few minutes, before Hugh's cheery voice called out to her :

"All right, Ada ! You needn't be afraid to look ; he won't frighten you or Aleppo any more."

There, like another St. George over the Dragon, stood Hugh, his handsome face flushed with excitement, bending over the defunct rattlesnake.

"Don't you want to see him near ? Why, Ada, I thought you were above such feminine weaknesses !"

"No, Hugh, I am nothing but a poor coward about snakes. Are you quite sure that he is dead ?"

"Well, to make assurance doubly sure, I am going to cut his head off," which Hugh proceeded to do. "Do come and look at him ; he is really a beauty."

And Ada, inwardly shuddering, could not seem ungrateful to her protecting knight, and unwillingly approached the prostrate foe.

"You have kept your pledge of being my chivalrous defender," she said, as cheerfully as

she could ; " I wonder will the others have any trophies to show ! "

" Not likely," said Hugh ; " they have kept up such a clatter and chatter, that the snakes have kept out of their way."

Aleppo was still quivering with his late excitement when Ada went up to him. She patted his arching neck, and spoke lovingly and soothingly to him, and presently he quieted down, and laid his head against her shoulder. She was still patting him when the rest of the party returned, hungry, but in high spirits, and were greeted by the sight of the snake, with which Hugh had festooned a bough of a sycamore.

" See," said Miss Crofton, pointing to it with her whip, " the valiant knight has slain the dragon ! "

" Have none of you anything to show ? " asked Hugh, derisively.

" No, you are the champion of the day," said Nettie ; " but we were fondly imagining that you and Ada would have had our luncheon unpacked when we returned, instead of being occupied with rattlesnakes."

The cavaliers helped the ladies to alight, and then Bruce turned to Ada.

" Were you frightened ? " he asked.

"Yes, miserably frightened; I told you that I should be."

"What a confession!" laughed Miss Crofton.
"Miss Selwyn afraid!"

"It is best to be honest, is it not?" said Ada, with a direct glance into the young lady's dark eyes.

There was something, she knew not what, almost antagonistic to her, in this handsome young stranger; an almost mocking tone in her voice when she addressed her, which would have easily disconcerted a person of less self-possession and refinement.

They were a very happy, merry party when the luncheon baskets were unpacked, and they were grouped about them in easy attitudes, enjoying Mrs. Musgrove's chicken pies and other delicacies.

Ada was the most silent, for she felt herself, to a certain extent, still a stranger amongst them, and her conversation with her two cousins that morning had somewhat saddened her. Neither had the two young men forgotten it. Not all the gay sallies and little wiles of Miss Crofton had restored Bruce to his normal state of proud self-satisfaction; for had he not met, for the first time, with deliberate, unyielding opposition? While as for Hugh,

even while taking part in the merry jesting going on around him, he could not but recall from time to time some of Ada's words, spoken with such direct simplicity and earnestness, when they were alone.

The afternoon waned only too quickly, and the sun dropped, prematurely as it seemed, behind the vast mountain west of the Cañon. First a rosy reflection and then a soft shadow fell around the merry party, and unwillingly it was agreed that the time for the return home had come.

Bruce was again Ada's companion, for he seemed unwilling to trust Aleppo to any other driver. The two were silent a good part of the distance to the Cañon-mouth, which they reached in time to see a second sunset in the open. Then through the short twilight and a lovely moon-rise, they drove on down the long, gentle incline. How intensely would Ada have enjoyed it, had she not felt that her pleasant relation with her cousin had been sadly marred !

The mocking-birds were singing their loudest when they drove into the ranch, and the mingled moonlight and shadows made it seem like fairy-land.

"How lovely this is !" said Ada, involuntarily,

"I wish all my Eastern friends could be here to-night!"

"Do you always want to share your pleasures?" asked Bruce.

"Yes, I think I do—all that can be shared."

"What an unselfish girl you are!"

"Not at all; do you not think our pleasures are increased by sharing them?"

"My philosophy has not gone out in that direction," laughed Bruce; "I fancy if you ask my character, you will find the verdict that I am a very self-contained person, and do not devote much thought to the pleasures of other people."

"You are giving yourself too bad a character, Bruce," exclaimed Ada; "I, for one, could not pass that verdict upon you."

"It is a true one, nevertheless," he said, defiantly. "Do you think I could have succeeded as I have, had I not devoted myself to my own aims and ends and not wasted time on other people?"

They had reached the house, and Ada had no time to reply to a speech which jarred upon her painfully. So the day ended with a discord.

Mrs. Musgrove was on the look-out for the young people, and it was a relief to Ada to see

the motherly face and to rest her head for a moment on her aunt's shoulder.

"Tired, my dear?"

"Yes, a little tired, auntie. It has been a wonderful day, but I feel like being a good child and going straight to bed."

Yet after she had gone to her room she sat thinking by the open window, in the darkness. And after a while Bruce came out with his cigar, and she saw his tall figure, now in moonlight, now in shadow, sauntering to and fro. The two minds were occupied with each other, but how differently! It was with a prayer for Bruce upon her lips that Ada at last fell asleep, while Bruce himself went to rest prayerless.

What a terrible mistake is a prayerless life; what a misconception of its own meaning, of its relation to the great author of all being; what a stifling of the deeper, higher attributes of the human soul!

Alas! for the dull ingratitude that loses sight of the Giver among the gifts, that grows unconscious of its real needs, and loses all perception of the glorious end for which we were created.

When we think of the uncertainty of life, of the burdens with which it is freighted, of human helplessness in the face of the awful forces by

which we are surrounded, it becomes a marvelous as well as a melancholy thing that there should be so many, even among those endowed with noble mental gifts, who have thus cut themselves adrift from God.

CHAPTER XI.

AT the breakfast-table, on the following Sunday, Ada turned to Hugh.

"Will you drive me over to Caliente, Hugh?" she asked, in her direct, simple way. "I do not care, unless in case of necessity, to repeat my last Sunday's experience with poor, dear Billy, and I *must* go to service.

There was just a moment's pause before Hugh answered.

Mrs. Musgrove began filling the coffee-cups in a reckless manner. Bruce turned quite pale, which was an ominous sign, and Nettie looked from one to the other curiously.

"I am at your service, Ada," replied Hugh; "for the honor of the Musgrove name I cannot let you drive Ichabod to Caliente again."

Bruce bit his lips to keep back the words which his common sense told him had better be left unsaid. For, after all, though hitherto Hugh had almost invariably allowed himself to be guided if not controlled by his elder

brother, yet he was a man, and entitled to a man's liberty of action.

It made it none the less exasperating to find that his (Bruce's) will and pleasure should be ignored, and that Ada should be the means of his authority being set aside in his own family. He could not altogether refrain.

"You understand, Hugh, that I enter my protest against any of our family going to Mr. Ashleigh's church. Ada knows my views—I need say nothing more. You are not children, and I cannot forbid your going."

"I am more than sorry, Bruce," said Ada, "to give you any annoyance, but as I told you the other day, I do not consider that I have any choice. I must attend church even at the risk of your displeasure."

Bruce vouchsafed no reply, and Hugh thought it best to remain silent also, though sorely tempted to make an angry reply to his brother.

A drive with Hugh behind a horse only inferior to Aleppo was a very different thing from a solitary drive with Billy; and Caliente was reached in what seemed an incredibly short time to Ada. The place looked just as it had on the previous Sundays, but passing the "saloons" at a rapid pace with Hugh was

so much better than creeping past them with the old horse alone !

The cousins had not conversed much as they drove along, but now, as they approached the church, Ada asked Hugh if he had ever seen it inside, and he replied in the negative.

" You are going in with me to-day, are you not, Hugh ?" she asked. If only she could bring him into contact with Mr. Ashleigh, she felt that a great step would be gained.

" Well, no," he answered, a little awkwardly ; " I thought of taking a drive, and coming back for you."

" Ah, Hugh ! have you forgotten all we talked about in the Cañon ? Come in with me ; you will not regret it."

And Hugh, as much as anything to show his independence of his brother, after a little further entreaty on Ada's part, consented.

Years, absolutely years, had passed since the young man had entered a place of worship, and it was with a strange hesitancy that he did so now. Ada had preceded him, and he found her kneeling alone in the little building. He stood for a few moments near the entrance before he joined her. The stillness, the subdued light, the altar in its chaste simplicity, with the plain, burnished cross and beautiful flowers, the soli-

tary, kneeling figure—there was something in it all that impressed him in a way for which he could not have accounted. He was touched by a new influence, one altogether outside the ordinary circle of his ideas and feelings. Ada rose from her knees, and looked round at him, with a smile that seemed one of affectionate welcome, as he took his place beside her.

“Is it not a dear little church?” she said, softly; “confess that you are pleased with it.”

“I am,” he said; “it is so different from what I expected.”

Just then Mr. Ashleigh entered the church, but not accompanied by his wife to-day. He looked even more careworn than on the previous Sunday, but his face brightened at the sight of Ada, and then an expression of astonishment passed over it, when the young girl introduced her companion as her cousin, Mr. Hugh Musgrove.

“I am glad to see you, Mr. Musgrove,” said the clergyman, kindly; “for many reasons, among the rest, that your cousin has had an escort to Caliente.”

“It was not my fault that she had none last Sunday,” replied Hugh, coloring a little, for to be thought lacking in gallantry touched him in a sensitive point.

"No, Hugh did not know last Sunday that I was coming," said Ada promptly, and then she inquired for Mrs. Ashleigh.

"My wife is not so well," replied the clergyman, and the shadow came over his face again. "She has had a slight hemorrhage during the week, and I could not allow her to risk the fatigue of the walk and the service. May I—will you play for us again?"

"I shall be only too glad if I may. I am so sorry," she added earnestly, "to hear about your wife. "Would she care, do you think, to see me after service for a little while?"

"You would do her more good than any doctor," he answered, smiling. "I will show you where we live."

He left them to prepare for service, and Ada took her place at the organ.

Hugh changed his seat, also, for one less conspicuous. In fact, he felt somewhat out of place and ill at ease.

Then Ada began a low, sweet prelude, and her cousin, being passionately fond of music, became, all unconsciously, attuned to his surroundings. How low and tender were those chords, even on the unpretending little instrument! They seemed to plead to the soul, to whisper of another, higher world than that of

human joys and sorrows, and then how solemn and deep, like a voice, speaking in awful and yet loving warning, of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.

A somewhat larger congregation than on Ada's first Sunday gathered in the little church, most of them inhabitants of Caliente, a few from out-lying ranches, amongst the latter, one or two of the Musgrove friends.

The service came to Hugh with the force of novelty, so long was it since he had attended it, and, in his then frame of mind, its solemnity and simple reverence touched him. Mr. Ashleigh's sermon, too, profoundly earnest and practical, could not be without its effect.

Hugh remained seated until the people had dispersed; he did not care to face the astonishment of his acquaintances at seeing him at church.

"It is not very far to our house," said Mr. Ashleigh, having declined Hugh's offer of a seat; "if you will drive slowly, I will walk along with you."

As Ada had supposed, the cottage on the outskirts of the town, which she had noticed on the occasion of her first visit to Caliente, was the parsonage, if indeed it could be dignified by that name. It was, in fact, so poor and roughly

constructed a dwelling that only a climate like Southern California, could have made it habitable. But the climate had also embellished it with exquisite creeping plants, and climbing roses, and shaded it from the fierce sun with a group of Eucalyptus and pepper trees.

Mr. Ashleigh helped Ada to alight, and Hugh said he would drive on and return for his cousin.

"I hoped so much that you would come to see me," said Mrs. Ashleigh, coming with outstretched hands to meet her visitor. "I really had a presentiment that you would."

Ada kissed the delicate, flushed face, and sat down beside her.

"I have been wanting so much to see you," she said; "you are so like a friend of mine whom I loved very dearly. I feel as if I had known you ever so long."

"Was she—?" Mrs. Ashleigh checked herself, but there was a sweet, wistful look in her eyes that almost brought tears to Ada's.

"We have had such a beautiful service," she said quickly; "only I missed you."

Mr. Ashleigh, who had lingered a moment to speak to Hugh, came into the room, and while he exchanged a loving greeting with his wife, Ada glanced at her surroundings. To one nur-

tured as she had been, it was indeed a poor home. With the exception of a comfortable easy-chair, there was nothing which did not betoken straitened circumstances, while at the same time the refinement of the occupants was equally visible. Home-made shelves laden with books, some beautiful flowers, and one choice, slightly framed engraving on the walls, Holman Hunt's "Shadows of the Cross."

"My husband would not let me go," said Mrs. Ashleigh, answering Ada. "I begged hard, but he can be a tyrant sometimes"; this with her slender hand clasping his, and a look of contented love in her eyes.

"I have brought you some peaches, because you were a good girl," he said, drawing some not very choice ones from his pocket. "I stopped at Chessley's on my way to church."

Ada thought of the magnificent fruit with which the trees on her cousins' ranch were literally bowed down; she thought, too, of the affluence and luxury in which they lived, without one thought, alas! of those who were living in the cold shadow of poverty and neglect, yet content could they but do some work for Him, who, blessed thought, was the "Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

"Who drove you over from the ranch?" asked Mrs. Ashleigh.

"Ah, there we have a surprise for you," said her husband, cheerily, "though, to say the truth, Miss Selwyn, my wife is already convinced that you are a wonder worker, so that she may take it quite as a matter of course when she hears that one of the Messrs. Musgrove were at service to-day."

"No, I am *not* surprised. I think Miss Selwyn's coming began a new era."

"Ah, dear Mrs. Ashleigh! may you be a true prophet! I wish I had the faith to believe as much."

"You will probably be the last one to realize it," the clergyman said, "but my wife may be quite right; your coming may be the means to carry out one of God's good purposes."

An hour had passed very quickly, when Hugh drove up to the garden gate, and Ada unwillingly parted from the Ashleighs, promising to come again at the first opportunity.

CHAPTER XII.

"THAT is a poor sort of parsonage," said Hugh, when they had driven a little way in silence ; "a rough place altogether for people of refinement."

"What did you think of Mr. Ashleigh ?" asked Ada.

"He seems a man of ability and culture," replied Hugh, somewhat hesitatingly ; "a man of character, and, I should judge, very much in earnest."

"Yes, and that explains why such a man and such a woman as his wife are content to live in a place like Caliente, and in a home like that miserable little place. Ah, Hugh ! it made my heart ache to see Mrs. Ashleigh to-day."

"Why ?" said Hugh, with half unwilling interest ; "was she very sick ?"

"If you had seen her, Hugh, I know your impulse would have been the same as mine—a longing to do something for her ! Why, they need what *you* would call almost the neces-

saries of life. And she looks so frail!—I wonder—”

“What?”

“I wonder if your mother—but I should not say that. I know that I have but to tell her what I have seen to make her want to do all in her power for Mrs. Ashleigh, but—there is Bruce!”

“Yes,” said Hugh, angrily, “and Bruce is as easily touched, where he has once made up his mind, as the ‘nether-millstone!’ Well, he has found to-day that I for one presume to have a will of my own.”

Ada was silent; it pained her to hear Hugh pronounce so harsh a verdict on his brother, though Bruce had given her little cause to think that it was undeserved, and she would fain have championed him, for, in despite of Bruce’s apparent harshness, she still believed in his better and nobler nature.

“It is a great grief to me, Hugh,” she said at last, hesitatingly, that I should be the cause of any difference between you, and yet, being here, I cannot take any other course. I have thought seriously, the last day or two, that it might be best for me to give up my pleasant home with you all. And then, again, it seems as if perhaps—though it may seem presumptuous—

tuous to say so—as if there might be a purpose in my coming.”

“I should say there *was* a purpose,” said Hugh, vehemently ; “don’t let me hear the smallest hint of your leaving us. I shall have to consider you my prisoner, and—yes—I shall put you on parole.”

Ada could not help laughing quite heartily, Hugh was so much in earnest.

“Well, if you really want me to stay, you must promise me not to have any scene with Bruce. But perhaps Bruce himself might wish me to go away !”

“Nonsense, Ada,” said Hugh, indignantly ; “and even if it were so, I hope you do not consider him an absolute authority !”

“No, but if I thought that *any* of you would be the happier for my absence, you may be sure, Hugh, that I could not stay.”

She spoke seriously, even sadly, and Hugh felt really troubled.

“Why, Ada,” he said, “you are taking this matter of Bruce too much to heart. It is true that he has grown to be something of a tyrant at home, but, after all, he is a Musgrove, and would feel as badly as any of us at his affection for you being called in question.”

“I am glad you think so.”

"Of course I think so. The fact is, Ada, we have all given way to Bruce—perhaps more than is good for him. You see he is a clever, ambitious fellow, and from a boy has had the faculty of managing people better than I shall do when I am twice his age," he added laughing; "and I have to confess that the Musgrove Ranch would not be what it is to-day, if Hugh instead of Bruce Musgrove had been at the head of affairs."

"How long is it since Uncle Musgrove died? I know that I was quite a child."

"I was not much more than a child myself, and Bruce was only sixteen. Mother will tell you that he seemed to take the whole burden of care upon his shoulders, and that he made the farm-hands respect and obey him from the first."

In spite of Hugh's sudden assertion of independence, he was at heart a warm admirer of his brother, and once launched upon the subject, he went on to speak of Bruce's untiring energy, self-denial and success in a way which might have wearied a hearer less interested than Ada.

But Ada, unconsciously to herself, wanted to regain her first opinion of Bruce, and Hugh found in her a willing listener.

The ranch looked more than usually beautiful to Ada, when they left the brown, barren land for the broad shadows of the great pepper-trees bordering the drive. Among the glossy foliage of the long ranks of orange-trees the fruit was beginning to mellow into spheres of gold. The house itself, with all the signs of taste and opulence, had never impressed her as looking so attractive as it did in contrast to the rude dwelling of the Ashleighs. In the long, shaded dining-room the table was set for lunch with snowy linen, delicate china, luscious fruits and other delicacies.

Mrs. Musgrove, looking rather anxious, sat awaiting them.

"You have been a long time gone," she said a little querulously. "Bruce took Nettie over to the Croftons to spend the day, and I thought I should have to sit down to luncheon alone."

"I wish you had been with us, dear auntie," said Ada, as she took her place at the table beside her, while Hugh took his brother's seat at the head of the table. "We have had a beautiful service, and Hugh will tell you what a dear little church it is."

"Why—was Hugh at church with you?"

There was a look of surprise, half painful, half pleasurable, in the mother's face. She was

devoted to all her children, but Hugh was perhaps her favorite child, the most responsive to his mother's affection.

"Why, Hughie! I wish I had been with you." And then she said, half to herself, "It is years since I was at church."

Ada was unspeakably touched by her aunt's look and words.

"You will come with us next time, auntie," she said tenderly; "it will be a happy, happy day for me when we go together."

"But Bruce—" faltered Mrs. Musgrove.

"Who knows but we shall conquer Bruce himself," said Ada, almost gayly, encouraged by success to be unreasonably sanguine.

The three had a pleasant afternoon together. Hugh admired and liked his cousin so much, that he was content to give up his usual Sunday afternoon excursion to spend it in her society; while Mrs. Musgrove was always happy with her children.

They sat under the live-oak, as Ada had done alone, and Hugh realized, as he had never done before, that there was a special beauty and peace about his home on Sunday.

Ada proposed that Hugh should read something to his mother and herself, and ran into the house for a book which she thought would

interest, and might influence, the young man—the “Life of Charles Kingsley.”

Hugh was a good reader, though not a practiced one, and soon the story of that remarkable life mastered his attention so completely that he read with entire unconsciousness of self. It was the first book of the kind he had ever read, and one which of his own choice he would not have thought of reading ; but the personal influence of Kingsley—that intense nature which touched so wide a circle by the force of his strong human sympathies—seemed even in the recital to lay hold of Hugh, and he read on with a zest far exceeding Ada’s hopes.

The shadows began to lengthen before he laid down the book, and then only at his mother’s suggestion.

“ Hugh, you are a fine reader,” said Ada, with enthusiasm. “ I never enjoyed Kingsley so much before.”

“ A noble life, is it not ? ”

Hugh’s eyes were bright with a warm interest. He had passed into a range of thought and feeling altogether new.

“ A man among men ! ” he exclaimed. “ I never realized that our present world could produce such people ! ”

“ Ah, but it *can* ! ” said Ada, her face bright-

ening as she spoke, "there are not a few such lives that we may read of, Hugh, and how many more that only God knows of!—lives of a perfect self-sacrifice, a noble devotion, which can have but *one* source!"

"Auntie," she continued, turning to Mrs. Musgrove, "I have been wanting to speak to you about Mr. Ashleigh and his wife. You may think it strange that I should feel such a deep interest in them already, but it is because I have a firm conviction that theirs are such lives as I was speaking of."

Mrs. Musgrove, with a look of awakened interest, began to question her niece, and Ada answered eagerly.

She was sitting on a low garden seat, and the sun, very near its setting now, threw a soft glow over her fair, expressive face. She might have set for a picture of Charity, as she extended her shapely hands, with an unconsciously pleading gesture; and Hugh thought his cousin was growing prettier every day.

CHAPTER XIII.

IT was just then that the sound of laughter and the clatter of horses' feet broke upon the evening stillness. Bruce and Nettie, with Miss Crofton and her brother, rode at a hand-gallop up the avenue. As they approached the group under the live-oak, Bruce grew suddenly silent. He had an eye for picturesque effects, and it may have been that he was struck with the picture—his mother with her soft, white hair and gentle face, thrown into relief by her dress of some rich, subdued color; Hugh reclining at her feet, his face turned admiringly towards his cousin; and Ada herself in her dress of simple white with the sunlight on her.

"Quite idyllic, is it not?" said Miss Crofton in her pretty mocking voice, but Bruce's answer, if he made any, was lost in the bustle of dismounting.

"We have brought Louise and Carl back to dinner, mother," said Nettie, as she stooped to give her mother a little kiss. Both the lady-equestrians were looking their best in their becoming habits.

"Always glad to see you, my dear," said Mrs. Musgrove, with cheerful hospitality, giving her hand to Miss Crofton, who also kissed her with much demonstration of affection, and then somewhat coldly shook hands with Ada.

Carl Crofton was tall and handsome, like his sister, and a devoted admirer of Nettie.

Ada waited in vain for a glance or word from Bruce. Having helped Miss Crofton to dismount, he had taken her horse with his own to the stables, and his cousin did not see him again till dinner.

Miss Crofton sat beside him and quite commanded his attention during the meal. She was full of vivacity, clever and gay, and certainly attractive; and Bruce, who was generally rather taciturn, talked more than Ada had yet heard him. The conversation turned chiefly on persons and events of local interest, with a running fire of amusing, often satirical, comment from Miss Crofton. Ada sat for the most part silent; the conversation had not much interest for her, and she would have liked to retire to her own room when the party adjourned to the drawing-room, but her aunt took her arm.

"Are you not well, my dear?" she asked affectionately; and Ada had to answer that she was, and so had no excuse for withdrawing.

The young people gathered about the piano, and, at Bruce's request, Miss Crofton sang. Her voice was powerful and well trained, and she sang, with perfect self-possession, some rather showy songs.

Ada had never been accustomed to secular music on Sundays, and could not enjoy it. Song after song Miss Crofton sang, most of them specially for Bruce, but at last she rose from the piano, and Hugh asked Ada to sing, and, when she declined, gayly insisted. Unwillingly she took her seat at the instrument, and ran her fingers softly over the keys. She would sing nothing secular, and she felt that sacred music must seem out of place here

At last her pure, cultured voice began that beautiful and touching hymn, "Lead, kindly Light," and a strange silence fell upon them all. Bruce had strolled to an open window. For the first time that evening he was alone. The moonlight lay silver white upon the garden, and the evening air came to him freighted with the perfume of violets, of which there was a large bed in the shelter of the house. The beautiful melody and touching words seemed to blend with the moonlight and perfume, and, in spite of the harshness of his feeling towards Ada, and his boasted lack of sympathy with the sen-

timent of the hymn, he listened spell-bound. He listened until, with the last lovely words,

“And with the morn those angel faces smile,
Which I have loved long since and lost awhile,”

sung with intense, pathetic feeling, the tender tones had ceased. His was the only voice that did not say anything in praise of the singer. Mrs. Musgrove and Hugh expressed their delight, Nettie her surprise.

“I really did not know that you could sing like that, Ada,” she said.

Young Crofton murmured something polite, while his sister declared that Miss Selwyn was really quite dramatic in her style. Hugh urged his cousin to sing again, but she begged to be excused.

There was no more music after that, and the conversation was not quite so lively as before. Miss Crofton asked Bruce to show her some plans he had been drawing of a new town which some enterprising land-owners of the Valley were talking of founding, Bruce as usual taking the lead in the new scheme. He had spoken of it to Ada, owning that it was his darling project, and had promised to show her the plans, but that was before the coolness which had sprung up between them, and which she, for her part,

had tried in vain to overcome. He got the drawings now, at Miss Crofton's request, and placed a lamp on a little table apart, that she might the better examine them.

Was it mere forgetfulness or an intentional omission, Ada wondered, that he did not ask his cousin to join them? She glanced once at the two heads bending over the papers, and then joined her aunt, who was sitting on a distant sofa.

"I want to say a little more about the Ashleighs," said Ada, "while we can have a chat to ourselves. She is in a wretched state of health, and looks as if she might not live much longer. But you know, Auntie, what careful treatment and nourishment will do. With these she might be spared to her husband for years to come—without them, he will lose her soon. And, Auntie, they are *everything* to each other."

"Poor things," said Mrs. Musgrove compassionately; "my dear, what can I do for them?"

"Ah, so much! you have such an abundance! a larder overflowing with good things, while they, I am certain, have the poorest and most meagre food. Then there is the kindness, the personal kindness that is so sweet, so comforting, and of which so little is shown them by those who could do so most easily. Auntie,

you must surely know how it pains me to feel that I am vexing Bruce, but I *must* follow the dictates of my conscience. It is not merely that my heart is touched by what I have seen of Mr. Ashleigh and his wife, but that I am constrained, yes, I am *constrained* to be faithful to the Church; and being so includes my loving interest and care for her clergy. I know I may speak freely to you. You will not be angry with me. You almost dread the thought of doing what Bruce disapproves, but remember you have to answer for yourself. And you are his *mother*; it is *you*, and not Bruce, who should be an authority in such matters."

"Yes, you are right, of course," faltered Mrs. Musgrove, "but, my dear child, I have always relied on him so much."

"Yes, and in many ways rightly, but there are things in which you *cannot* rely upon him. You must not let him stand between you and your duty. And of this I am sure: in the end he will respect you the more for doing what you feel to be right."

In her earnestness Ada had laid her hand upon Mrs. Musgrove's arm, and her voice, though so low that only her aunt could hear her words, reached Bruce's ear, as he bent over his drawings with Miss Crofton, at the other

end of the long room. He looked up and saw the fair, pleading face, as he had seen it at sunset under the live-oak. And again a feeling for which he could not account, a sharp sense of pain, yet with an underlying joy, passed through and through him. Ada was all unconscious, but Miss Crofton had followed Bruce's glance, and noted that he seemed for a moment to lose his interest in the darling project which had so strongly aroused her own.

"Yes," said Mrs. Musgrove, with a sigh, "I am afraid I have made idols of my children, or, at least, I have lost sight of any other duties in living for them."

She spoke so meekly and penitently that the tears came to her niece's eyes.

"It looks so presumptuous in me," she said tenderly, "to speak to you as I do, but I cannot help it, Auntie. You will forgive me, I know. It is because I love you so well and know how good you are, that I do so long"—her voice failed her as she leaned her head against her aunt's shoulder—"I do so long to have you all that our dear Lord meant you to be."

Mrs. Musgrove slipped her arm about the girl's waist and kissed her fondly.

"Pray for me, my child," she whispered.

That was all, but the words were full of promise.

The evening had worn away : Hugh, with his sister and Carl Crofton, had been strolling about in the moonlight and had just come in from the veranda.

"I shall be jealous, Mammie," said Nettie ; "you and Ada are always making love to each other, and your only daughter is left out in the cold."

Miss Crofton had at last torn herself away from the engrossing drawings, and had realized the lateness of the hour.

"Poor Nettie !" she said, caressingly, laying her hand on her friend's shoulder ; "you must come to me to be comforted ! I fear Miss Selwyn is supplanting you in your mother's affections."

The words were jestingly said, and yet Ada felt that they contained a sting.

"That is a terrible accusation," Miss Crofton, she said, half seriously. "I must not come to you for a character."

"There will be no need," said Hugh ; "the Musgrove Ranch will give you a character."

"Thank you, Hugh ! I know I have you for a champion," said Ada, laughingly extending her hand to her cousin, who, dropping on one

knee in a dramatic manner, carried it to his lips.

"See, Mr. Musgrove," said Miss Crofton, stepping to one side, "is not that a pretty tableau? What shall we call it? the Knight and the Damosel, or what?"

Bruce looked at the group with a certain displeasure in his eyes, but only laughed without replying.

The horses had been brought round, and having made her graceful adieus and reminded Bruce of an appointment with her father, Miss Crofton took her departure.

CHAPTER XIV.

BRUCE had been absent for several days ; in fact, Ada had not seen him since the evening on which Miss Crofton and her brother had dined at the ranch. His cousin missed him ; there was no denying that life at the ranch lost in interest in the absence of the eldest son. His strong, terse sayings were missed at the family table ; there was a force and energy about him which made him, even in his least genial moods, really the centre of thought and action in his home.

And yet Ada was not unwilling that he should be absent, for if life lost somewhat of its interest, it was at least more peaceful, and she was not continually reminded by Bruce's cold and formal manner to herself that she had forfeited his favor.

Had she not possessed an affectionate and peace-loving nature, there might have been a certain satisfaction in the consciousness that she had won a signal victory over the autocratic Bruce, and had even emancipated Hugh

from his brother's hitherto unquestioned authority, but, being what she was, Ada could only keenly regret the necessity for her action.

Hugh, having broken what he termed his leading-strings, was willing to make the best use of his new-found freedom, while Mrs. Musgrove, deeply impressed by what Ada had told her of the Ashleighs, and with awakened consciousness of her sad remissness in the past, was anxious in some measure to atone for it ; and Bruce's absence was opportune, since she had not to encounter his satire or displeasure.

It was not Ada, but her aunt, who first proposed that Hugh should drive them over to Caliente. She wished to be introduced to the Ashleighs. Nettie opened wide her pretty eyes at such a proposition ; under her bright, trifling manner there was a large amount of selfishness, which made it very hard to touch her in things unconnected with herself.

"Why, mother !" she exclaimed, "what has come over you ? What in the name of common sense do you want to know them for ?"

The painful flush which Ada had seen before, stole over her aunt's face, but she answered in a tone which was new to her petted daughter.

"You are not speaking to me as you ought, Nettie. You have no right to use such lan-

guage about anything I may think it right to do."

It was Nettie's turn to flush now, and tears of vexation came into her eyes.

"Yes," she pouted, "Louise Crofton was quite right when she said that Ada was putting me in the background. Whatever she says or does is right. But we shall see what *Bruce* thinks of your making friends with the Ashleighs," she added; "you would not visit them if he were at home!"

It was a revelation of Nettie's disposition for which Ada was not prepared, and her look of surprise added fuel to Nettie's indignation.

"It is not fair to Bruce," she said, "that you should do what he disapproves of, to please Ada. I shall tell him, when he comes back, that I did all I could to prevent it."

And then she rose from her seat and marched out of the room.

"Don't trouble about her," said Hugh to both the ladies. "You did not know, Ada, that Nettie was such a little termagant. The fact is," he added, sententiously, "we have all had our own way a little too much."

"Yes," said Mrs Musgrove, sadly, "I have been a very weak mother, my dear."

"You have been the best little mother," said

her son affectionately, putting his arm about her, "and we ought all to have turned out model children."

But Mrs. Musgrove shook her head sadly.

"Go and order the carriage, Hugh," she said, with more decision of manner than Ada had ever noticed in her. "Nettie must see that she cannot turn me from what I feel to be right."

So the carriage was brought, and Nettie, with indignant eyes, watched the departure.

She was still nursing her grievance, though several hours had elapsed, and feeling more injured than perhaps ever before in her short, careless life, when Bruce unexpectedly returned.

He had been camping with a party of surveyors and others of his acquaintance on the site of the proposed new town, and the days had been spent in projecting and marking out the future streets and surveying the surrounding land.

Although one of the youngest in the party, he had been constantly referred to and his suggestions sought and followed. All this, and the free, careless life, the rides hither and thither on swift Aleppo, the nights under the stars (for Bruce despised the shelter of a tent), with

the cool breeze creeping past him and stirring his hair as with the touch of invisible fingers, was just what Bruce needed to restore him to his normal condition, which Ada, in more ways than one, had disturbed. With all the strength of his strong will he was putting her away from him, as a perplexing, not to say harassing, subject, and was succeeding fairly well. Yet, to say the truth, in those still, starlight nights, when the camp-fires had died down and his companions were asleep, thoughts of his firm and gentle cousin would sometimes assert themselves. Sometimes even the breeze would seem to whisper words that she had spoken, even taking the tone of her voice. Once as he lay awake, in the deep hush of midnight, the waning moon hanging low in the west and the great solemn stars slowly moving in their courses overhead, Ada's pure, clear-cut face, with that strange look of compassion, seemed to bend out of the darkness.

"Have you put science in the place of God, Bruce?"

Had he indeed put God out of his life? Were the motives which made his cousin's life what it was, purely imaginary? They were real enough to her; they were real enough to mold her character into something vastly

different from that of any other person whom he knew.

Bruce did not allow himself to follow a train of such thoughts. He had, he said to himself, long since become emancipated from the whole confusion of man-made creeds. Nature and her hand-maid, Science, were enough for him, enough to occupy all the powers of his mind, to satisfy every desire and ambition of his being. And he wrapped himself in his camping blanket, resolutely closing his eyes to the vision of Ada's pleading face and all that it suggested.

The site of the proposed town was some five or six miles from Miss Crofton's home, and every few days she rode over with her father, who was also interested in the scheme; her brother being one of the camping party.

Very handsome looked Miss Crofton, with a pretty flush on her cheeks and a bright recognition in her eyes whenever she discovered Bruce among the little crowd of surveyors and projectors. Her interest never flagged in the scheme, and Bruce had to point out to her the whole town, as it was to be. It was so much more satisfactory than merely seeing it on paper, she declared. *Now* the whole thing was clear to her.

"Have you decided on the name, Mr. Mus-

grove?" she asked, one day, as the party were seated at luncheon, in the shade of some live-oaks. She had brought over a basket of various delicacies, as an addition to their camping fare, and all were in high good humor.

"No," replied Bruce; "it is rather a serious matter, this naming our future metropolis. I think, myself, that there is a great deal in a name, the poet notwithstanding."

"Wouldn't *Musgrove* be a well-sounding name?" she said, so softly that only Bruce caught the words.

She saw the color rise to his face, and knew that she had touched him in a vulnerable point.

"From your lips," he answered, gallantly, "but I am not so arrogant as to suppose that my name should be the one chosen; I am only one of many equally interested."

"But not equally influential," she said, still in the same tone of subtle flattery.

"Let me propose it."

"No, no, I beg you," he said hastily.

If the town were to be named after him, the proposition must come from some of those associated with him in the enterprise.

Yet the suggestion had been pleasant and flattering, and Miss Crofton's lips had been the first to utter it.

It was that very afternoon that Bruce, remembering some home affairs which might possibly have been neglected by Hugh, determined to ride over to the ranch and spend the night there.

It was a long ride even on so fleet a steed as Aleppo, and the afternoon was almost spent when the confines of the Musgrove Ranch came in sight. Bruce's mind had been busy with a thousand things as he galloped along, over mile after mile of open country. He loved to weave plans for the future, to feed his ambition with bold projects which should result in wealth and power and honor, and the swift motion of his horse, and the strong breeze from the ocean which swept over the upland, quickened his brain and pulses.

He would have haughtily denied that the anticipation of meeting his stubborn little cousin had the remotest connection with his pleasurable excitement. When he reached the house he sprang from his horse and threw the reins with a friendly nod to Sandy, who had spied his young master afar off.

"Every one away, Sandy?" he asked, for both the veranda and the shade of the live-oak were deserted.

"Miss Nettie is home, sir, but the Mistress

and the young lady and Master Hugh went out driving. "I'm thinking they're late."

"Where are you, Nettie?" called Bruce, in his ringing, imperious voice, and Nettie emerged from the drawing-room.

As I said, she had been nursing her grievance, and still felt injured and sullen, for had she not spent a long solitary afternoon?

"I'm glad you have come back, Bruce," she said. "I hope you have come to stay. Things don't seem to go on as they should when you are not at home."

Nettie seldom condescended to compliment her brother, and Bruce looked a little amused as he pinched her cheek.

"I've only come to stay till to-morrow. It will take another week or two to get things underway up there. What has been going wrong?"

CHAPTER XV.

NETTIE had at all times a slight tendency to mischief, but to-day it had been fanned into something more, and she had never practiced the difficult art of self-control.

"Only that mother seems to be turned round in the most unaccountable manner, and lets Ada manage her as if her will was law."

"And how has she been exercising it?" asked Bruce, carelessly enough, but the pleasant ring had gone out of his voice.

"Why, you might suppose that it was something about the Ashleighs. You know Ada is quite infatuated with them, and now she has chosen to take mother over to see them. I said that it was unfair to you, while you were away, to do what would annoy you so much, but they *would* go."

Bruce made no reply. His silence was so ominous that Nettie felt a little frightened.

"Yes, I did what I could to prevent it," she said, nervously, "but Louise was quite right: Ada is everything with mother now, and I am nothing."

Still no response from Bruce.

"Why don't you speak, Bruce?" said his sister, impatiently.

"What do you want me to say?" he replied, in his harshest tones. "You know without my telling you how gratifying your news is;" and he turned away and strode out of the house.

If Nettie had felt aggrieved and forlorn before Bruce's arrival, she felt tenfold so now. Her brother's contemptuous harshness made her cup overflow, and she sat down in the solitary, dusky drawing-room and had a long, miserable cry all to herself. She could hear Bruce striding to and fro on the veranda. She knew well that she had succeeded in raising a storm, and gradually began to fear that it was more formidable than she had intended; she even began to look forward with some apprehension to the return of the others from Caliente.

It was strange that they had not yet returned, for night was closing in, and Mrs. Musgrove disliked driving after dark.

At last, just as Nettie had worked herself into a state of nervous excitement, the carriage drove up.

"Hello, Bruce!"

Hugh had descried his brother's tall form on the veranda, and, though himself somewhat

apprehensive of an unpleasant reception, was not sorry to see him, and, as he would have said, get things into shape as soon as possible.

"Well, Bruce," said Mrs. Musgrove, nervously, as her eldest son, without much alacrity, approached and helped her to alight, "when did you come home?"

"An hour or two ago," he answered coldly, scarcely returning the kiss with which she greeted him. And then he stood for a moment waiting for Ada to alight. It had grown so dark that he could not see the interior of the carriage. Hugh had jumped down from the driver's seat.

"We have left Ada at Caliente," he said, and then added hurriedly, "I may as well tell you, Bruce, that mother and I went over with her to call on the Ashleighs. We found Mrs. Ashleigh very ill, and Ada insisted on remaining to nurse her, but she hopes to be back next week."

Bruce's indignation had chiefly centered in Ada. It was of her that he had thought, as he had paced to and fro; of her utter disregard of his strongly expressed feelings, of her deliberate effort to influence his own family to act in opposition to his wishes. It was the meeting with *her* which he had anticipated with the in-

dignant determination, once for all, to express his opinion of her course of action and of the religion which led her to stir up dissension in his family. He felt his to be a righteous indignation. He would receive her coldly, and request her to have a conversation with him alone that evening. He preferred rather to speak with her alone than in the presence of the others. He had pictured to himself how she would look, how she would have to acknowledge that even from her own standpoint she was doing evil that good might come, and perhaps, perhaps, if she were duly penitent, he might forgive her.

And now—the feeling which Bruce experienced was a strange, unreasonable disappointment, an angry disappointment, all the more keen because it could not be expressed.

“I wish you joy of your new acquaintances,” he said, scornfully. “They must respect you, at all events, for the family feeling which leads you to make much of a man who has insulted your brother.”

Hugh had no opportunity to reply, for his brother turned away abruptly.

It was the first time since Ada Selwyn's arrival among them that the Musgrove family had spent an evening without her, and it was strange

what a blank her absence caused. The bright face, with its look of ready sympathy, the friendly, gentle voice, that had grown so familiar and seemed like an added harmony, the ready wit, never indulged at the expense of others, had grown to be an influence sweet and wholesome as sunshine, of whose value we often only become conscious when it is withdrawn.

Dinner was a very silent meal. Mrs. Musgrove and Hugh had spoken with each other on their drive homeward, and both felt now that neither Bruce nor Nettie was in a mood to listen to their changed views or the impressions they had received.

Hugh addressed some questions to his brother about the new town, to which Bruce briefly replied, and in his turn inquired if certain instructions of his had been carried out. The mother and daughter did not exchange many words. For the first time, Nettie saw something in her mother's face which gave her a vague uneasiness. Hitherto she had always, even when she had deserved her mother's displeasure, been absolutely sure of speedy pardon, and valued it, accordingly, all too lightly. But to-night in the gentle, saddened face she saw something like an unspoken rebuke.

"I am going back in the morning, mother," said Bruce, "and so will say good night."

He had refrained from saying anything harsh to her. It may have been that the same pre-occupied expression which had puzzled Nettie had its influence on him, or that the indignation against Ada had dominated him to the extent of making him overlook the delinquencies of the others. After all, Ada was the head and front of their offending.

"Good night, my son." Mrs. Musgrove lifted her face to his and laid her hand lightly on his shoulder. She kissed him, and, as he was about to leave her, she said softly :

"Bruce, dear, don't leave your mother with a feeling of anger in your heart. What I have done was in obedience to what I felt was right."

Bruce waved his hand impatiently. Why, his mother seemed to have borrowed Ada's very tone and words.

"I am not angry, mother," he said, half contemptuously; "it is your own look-out if you choose to be led blind-fold by a girl's whims and fancies ; only you can hardly expect me to sympathize with you in your new departure."

"Ada is not a girl of whims and fancies, and you know it, Bruce."

It was Hugh's voice, speaking warmly and indignantly. He had just entered the room in time to catch Bruce's reply to his mother.

"Don't excite yourself," said Bruce, in his coldest tones. "I am not disposed to argue the point. We each have our own views on the matter. You are welcome to yours. Good night."

"It is too bad that Bruce should presume to express such an opinion of Ada. He is arrogant—"

"Hugh, Hugh!" said his mother, imploringly, "Ada would be the last to wish you to quarrel with Bruce about her"; and Hugh had to admit the truth of the assertion.

"It will all come right, dear," she went on; "since I have begun to see my duty, I have faith to believe that God will help me to do it."

On her way to her own room that night Mrs. Musgrove entered her daughter's. Nettie was lying asleep, her pretty face a little flushed, and the frown that had spoiled it through the day not yet quite smoothed out. A novel, not of the highest type, lay by her pillow. She had read herself to sleep, and the lamp burned beside her. Shading her eyes from the light, the mother stood, looking down upon her child, and as she looked, tears, heavy, burning tears, dropped one by one.

Why was not this fair, young, only daughter of hers what Ada was? Where was the sweet

unselfishness, the calm and steadfast devotion to duty, the child-like, yet exalted faith? True, Ada was a few years her senior, but all these were fruits of an almost life-long growth.

It was a heart-searching sermon which the young unconscious sleeper was preaching to the mother.

The thought of Ada at that hour, ministering with skillful hand and loving heart to a helpless sufferer, came to deepen the impression of her own child's absolute selfishness, of the lack of any aims or motives in her life beyond the careless enjoyment of the passing hour.

But, we may well believe, it was with no censure of her beloved child that the mother stood gazing at her ; it was, rather, with a profound sense of her own failure in bringing up the children whom God had given her, as heirs of an immortal heritage, as those who must give account of the life which had been bestowed upon them.

Overcome by emotion, she sank at last upon her knees, with a voiceless prayer for grace and strength for the future. Then laying her face beside Nettie's on the pillow, she softly kissed her, leaving a mother's blessing when she went away.

CHAPTER XVI.

THAT night the shadow of death seemed resting on the little parsonage at Caliente. But it was not a horror of great darkness to the stricken heart of Eustace Ashleigh. He was ready, if God willed it so, to yield up his beloved without a murmur, yet—if the cup might pass from him!

How passionately Ada had prayed that night. Her whole heart went out to them, and they both felt the unspeakable comfort of a deep, human sympathy.

When Ada, with her aunt and cousin, had arrived at the parsonage, they found Mrs. Ashleigh in a most critical condition. A severe hemorrhage had completely prostrated her, and she could only look a tender welcome to Ada, as she approached her bed-side. In a few minutes afterwards Hugh had driven off, as fast as his horses could carry him, to obtain the services of a skillful physician who resided at the nearest town, some ten miles distant, and Mrs. Musgrove was talking to Mr. Ashleigh

with the kindly interest of an old friend, while Ada had constituted herself nurse, and was moving noiselessly about the sick-room, putting things in order with a magical touch, and making arrangements for the invalid's comfort.

Some hours elapsed before Hugh's return with the doctor. The afternoon was wearing away, and Mrs. Musgrove felt that they must set out on their return, but Ada had already come to the conclusion that her place, for the present, was with those who needed her so sorely.

"Hugh will bring me some things to-morrow," she said, "when he comes with what you are going to send. I hope you will miss me a little." And she kissed her aunt good-bye, and waved her hand from the doorway as Hugh drove off.

Mrs. Musgrove had not attempted to dissuade her niece from her purpose, for that the need was incontestable, and that she had made up her mind, was evident.

The utmost care was needed, the doctor had said, and the strictest adherence to his directions. With these, partial recovery, at least, was quite possible, even probable.

Towards evening hushed footsteps came and went about the parsonage, for the news of

Mrs. Ashleigh's illness had got abroad, and among the scattered church people were those who had begun to realize the devotion of their pastor and his sweet wife, and they came with sympathy, if nothing more, and some with anxious offers of help.

Ada dismissed them with gentle words of thanks, and promises, in case of need, to claim their assistance. Then night settled down, and in this quiet outskirts of the town there was little or nothing to disturb the invalid, as she lay motionless upon her pillows, oftenest with closed eyes, though not asleep.

The first half of the night Mr. Ashleigh had insisted upon watching, promising Ada to awake her after midnight; when, refreshed with a few hours' sleep, she took his place till morning.

In the "small hours" Mrs. Ashleigh fell into a quiet slumber, which Ada knew to be the best medicine. And then the young girl moved the curtain a little, that she might see the dawn and sunrise. It was not the first time that she had watched through a night by a sick-bed, sometimes by the sick-bed of those nearest to her heart. This slow breaking of the dawn, after a night so spent, how strange and sad it seems! All the world lies in slumber; only

the watchers with their sorrow are awake to see that first mysterious change from darkness to light, so cold and chill at first, that it makes common things look weird and unfamiliar.

Ada stood and watched that daily miracle of the returning light ; and solemn thoughts of death, the dark threshold of the life to come, stirred in her mind and made her young face look grave and awe-struck as the first touch of day fell on it.

Gradually the shadows melted away before the growing light, and the low, tender twitter of a bird close by the partially open window came to her like a sweet message of endless love. She turned to look at her patient ; Mrs. Ashleigh was sleeping as peacefully as a child, with faint but regular breathings, and Ada, with a thrill of thankfulness, recognized that the symptoms were even more favorable than the doctor had anticipated.

She said her morning prayer by the bed-side, and then stole softly out into the garden, to breathe for a few moments its early fragrance.

The flowers were beginning to clothe themselves in divers colors, and the birds seemed to be trying their separate notes, before striking into one grand chorus of delight.

Ada walked down the garden path to the

little gate in the fence which inclosed the parsonage garden, and, as she stood, leaning against it, the far-off sound of a horse's feet struck upon her ear. Very faintly at first, as if at a great distance, then nearer and louder, and at last, watching with a half-conscious expectancy for this early rider, Ada became aware of a familiar form, and — yes, it was Bruce himself, who was riding along the road that passed the parsonage.

In her first gladness at the sight of him, his cousin did not ask whether his being there had any connection with herself. She only saw that it was Bruce, whom she had not seen for what seemed a long time. Of course she must speak to him.

In one hand she held a white rose or two, with the other she opened the garden-gate and stood awaiting him.

Caliente does not lie in a direct line from the Musgrove Ranch to the new town, and when Bruce started from his home at daybreak he had no intention of diverging towards a place which of late had had for him only unpleasant associations; still less had he the faintest thought of meeting Ada at such an hour, nor would such a probability have led him to change his route; on the contrary he would not, of his own will, have met his cousin.

And yet—so strangely inconsistent are we mortals—here he found himself, and here, standing in his way, with a smile of welcome on her sweet face, was Ada.

In the confusion of feeling which her presence caused him he hardly knew what he did. Aleppo recognized her too, for as his master reined him in, the beautiful creature stooped his head as if waiting for a caress from the white hand of his friend.

“Have you been at home Bruce?” she asked. “I am so glad that I happened to be up and out to see you for a moment, for, I suppose, you were not coming to see me?”

“No, I had no thought of seeing you at such an hour.”

“Did you—know that I was here?”

“Yes, I spent last night at the ranch, and heard of your taking up the office of a good Samaritan.”

If Bruce had intended a sneer he had not succeeded as well as usual. There was something in the gentle face, pale with the night watching, which disarmed him.

“I wish I could,” she said.

“Would you nurse a heathen like myself, if I were sick?” he asked, wondering at himself as he did so.

"If you would let me," she answered, "only too gladly."

Then there was a moment's silence between them, she resting the hand that held the white roses on Aleppo's neck.

"I must go now," she said. "Mrs. Ashleigh is very, very ill."

"And you, I suppose, are doing your best to make yourself ill also. You look as if you needed nursing yourself!" and then he muttered to himself, "Absurd!"

"I never felt better, only a little sleepy. Good-bye, dear, beautiful Aleppo. Good-bye, Bruce."

"Good-bye, Ada."

She shook hands a little shyly with him and he galloped off, turning his head once to see her disappear within the parsonage.

Mile after mile through the sweet morning air galloped Aleppo, and his master was so lost in thought that he was scarcely conscious of the road he traveled. His indignation of the previous night was abated, but he felt angry with himself. He felt that he had not shown his cousin how thoroughly she had offended him, by forming a friendship with the Ashleighs. It was an absurdity, this going to nurse the clergyman's wife. Some neighbor, or a hired nurse, might have been procured if needed,

but Ada, a young, delicately nurtured girl—it was only another proof of her unreasonable self-will, of her utter disregard of his wishes.

Doubtless Aleppo wondered why his master was so unreasonable as to urge him up a steep incline, which he would rather have taken leisurely, but Bruce felt as if he would have flown, if he could, from the irritating thoughts that pursued him.

He was glad when he came in sight of the cluster of little white tents by the foot-hill. He would have enough to engross his mind and energies here, and there would be no room for petty annoyances.

“Hullo, Musgrove! back in time for breakfast,” shouted one of the party who was taking his turn to prepare that meal, and was frying “flap-jacks” over the fire which crackled and flamed in the fire-place of rough stones, built in a convenient locality.

“Yes,” said Bruce, “I started before day-break, and,” looking at his watch, “Aleppo has made good time. I warn you that I am hungry.”

“Glad to see you back, Musgrove,” said another, issuing from his tent. “Those railroad men have sent us word that they are coming over from Los Angeles, and we may hope, now that you are here, to get things fixed up.”

CHAPTER XVII.

THE coming of the railroad men meant a great deal to the projectors of the new town. It meant in all probability a large measure of success in their undertaking. It meant, in fact, a realization of what seemed, even to themselves, somewhat chimerical, for, at that time, though only a very few years ago, people had not the unlimited confidence in the future of this wonderful land which they have now.

Bruce, though on the one hand the most cautious, had been the most sanguine, and now, when he heard of the advent of the railroad men, his heart gave a throb of exultation. Yes, if he could make them see things in the right light—and he felt little doubt of succeeding in this—the future of the yet unnamed town was assured.

“Carl,” he said to young Crofton, who had just come into camp with his gun over his shoulder and his game-bag filled with mountain-quail, “do you think your sister, at such short notice, would entertain these gentlemen, if I rode over

with them in the afternoon? It is too far for me to take them home, and she is always gracious and hospitable."

"Not a doubt of it," replied the young man, laughing; "any friends of yours, you know, will be welcome."

"It seems almost imposing on her good-nature," said Bruce, seemingly unconscious of the implied compliment, "but it is desirable to make the best impression, and to show them what one of our homes can offer in culture and resources."

"You are a long-headed Scotchman," said the young man who was acting as cook, admiringly. "Were you born on this side of the water?"

But Bruce was too much engrossed by the matter in hand to do more than answer "yes," abstractedly.

"Too Scotch to take a joke, however," muttered the other, as Bruce strode away to confer with some of the elders.

About noon a couple of carriages, filled with portly, responsible looking gentlemen, arrived at the camping-ground and were warmly welcomed.

It was Bruce who imperceptibly became the chief speaker, and to whom the strangers grad-

ually addressed themselves more and more, evidently impressed by the experience and sagacity, remarkable in so young a man, no less than by his self-contained and somewhat authoritative manner.

Carl Crofton, in accordance with Bruce's suggestion, had ridden over to his father's ranch early in the day, and told his sister of the coming guests, and the young lady had instantly determined to make the visit in every sense a success.

Her Chinese cook was really a marvel of skill and patience, and her Irish hand-maid splendidly under control. Their mistress, who from a child, owing to her mother's early death, had been accustomed to govern the household, on this occasion surpassed herself.

On the east side of the house was a wide piazza, literally curtained with climbing roses, whose snowy, crimson, and creamy blossoms grew in delightful clusters amid the glossy leaves; and here, rather than in the dining-room, Miss Crofton had the table prepared for guests whom Bruce Musgrove was to bring with him. The result of all these preparations was all that could have been desired, and the young lady had her reward in the look of grateful acknowledgment with which Bruce greeted her on his

arrival with the important visitors, when the afternoon was about half spent.

The young hostess, in her most becoming costume, awaited them with her father, and it was quite evident that the gracious hospitality with which they were welcomed, impressed the strangers most favorably. Dinner in the fragrant shade of the rose-covered piazza was as attractive to the eye as to the palate. Conversation flowed easily and pleasantly, and many were the graceful compliments bestowed upon the *one* lady of the party. Miss Crofton was in her element. To be appreciated and admired is always agreeable, and to be so in the presence of a person whom you wish to impress with a sense of your value is peculiarly so.

After dinner the gentlemen strolled about the ranch, which was extensive, and well cared for, and during the stroll the conversation took a business turn. Bruce, under a calmness of manner which might have been almost indifference, was in reality profoundly anxious to bring the question of the branch railway to an issue.

Success and failure often lie so near together that what seems an unimportant step may make the whole difference between them, and the

young man was fully conscious of the importance of turning the present hour to advantage. He was walking with a gentleman whose "yea or nay" would incline the scale this way or that; a hard-headed, terribly experienced man of business, and of the world, over and over a millionaire too, who, had he so willed it, might have built the railroad at his own expense; and it was a proof of Bruce's self-control, that he showed no trace of nervousness or excitement while conversing with this formidable person.

Whether it was that the gentleman recognized in Bruce some of the qualities which, he was accustomed to boast, had raised him from a "city Arab" to what he was, or that on its own merits the scheme approved itself to his mind, after a long pause, which Bruce intuitively felt to be the turning-point of the negotiation, the millionaire pledged himself in a few words to the undertaking.

Just for a little moment Bruce was silent; he had worked very hard for this result, and his bosom swelled with a throb of triumph.

"I thank you, sir," he said, holding out his hand to his companion; "I thank you in the name of our company, as well as in my own, and I pledge my word that you will not regret your determination."

A short but satisfactory conversation followed. As they turned toward the house, the carriages which were to convey the party to the distant station drove up.

"Only just in time," said Bruce to himself; "had I not clinched the matter now, it might have been delayed indefinitely."

Success was to Bruce more exhilarating than a draught of strong wine, and Louise Crofton noted the exultant flash in his eyes, and felt that all was right.

When the gentlemen had taken their leave, she turned to the young man in the most winning manner. "I need not ask you the result," she said; "I see it in your face."

"We have to thank you for our success," he replied, allowing himself to show how elated he was. "The whole thing hung in the balance, and your hospitality decided it."

"I only carried out your suggestions," she said, meekly, "I did my best, however."

It was a grand success," he rejoined. "I must tell mother that there is another house-keeper in the valley, besides herself."

Louise laughed. "But a long, long way behind her," she said, archly; "don't dare to tell dear Mrs. Musgrove that I am anywhere near her." And then she added, incautiously,

"I know Miss Selwyn would be scandalized; she would think you wanting in proper respect. Your cousin is such a perfect person, that I am really afraid of her."

But at the mention of Ada's name, coupled with that little sneer, the pleasant look faded from Bruce's face. The wisest of us sometimes make mistakes, and the laughing, handsome girl could not know that, while she spoke, a sudden vision came for him of Ada standing waiting for him in the early morning light, with the roses in her hand, and with a smile of welcome, as though he had never uttered one harsh word to her, or had an angry thought.

"She is not such an alarming person," he answered, "and, I am sure, would not plead guilty to the charge of being perfect."

"Oh, no, we sinners are the ones to think well of ourselves," she retorted. "Miss Selwyn is a *saint*, and consequently bound to consider herself a 'miserable sinner'—is not that a paradox?"

"It sounds like one," he replied, and laughed at the pretty, puzzled look in the young lady's face, though he felt unaccountably annoyed.

"Tell me," she said—"you know that among my virtues, feminine curiosity has a place—does Miss Selwyn attend church at Caliente?"

I have a maid who is perversely addicted to going there on Sundays, and she solemnly avers that a young lady from the Musgrove Ranch plays the organ for the Episcopal service. Dear, naughty Nettie I *knew* it could not be, and so was driven to the conclusion that it *must* be Miss Selwyn."

"My cousin has not made me her confidant in the matter," replied Bruce; "she does go to church at Caliente, but as to her being organist, I have to leave your feminine curiosity ungratified."

"But she *does* really go to church there!" exclaimed Miss Crofton, opening her eyes in well-feigned astonishment; "how funny—I mean how strange—I thought—"

"What did you think?" asked Bruce, almost harshly, with one of his sudden frowns.

"O, Mr. Musgrove, I beg your pardon," she said. "I have been indiscreet to speak as I have done—I am sorry." *

She seemed really pained, and her handsome eyes, shaded by their long lashes, looked as if tears might be near.

"It is for me to beg your pardon," said Bruce; "you have done so much for me to-day, and I have been ungrateful enough to speak almost rudely. Accept my humble apology."

Just at that moment Carl Crofton rode up, leading Bruce's horse. They were expected at the camping-ground, where the rest of the party were naturally anxious to know how the matter of the railroad had progressed.

"And once more my fervent thanks," said Bruce, holding out his hand, which Miss Crofton accepted with a pretty show of forgiveness.

She watched the young men out of sight, however, with an unsmiling face and a growing dislike to Ada, whom she regarded as the cause of the first approach to unfriendliness between Bruce and herself.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IT was late before the camp-fire died down that night. There was much eager conversation and sanguine anticipation among the party ; for, now, since that decisive conversation between Bruce and Mr. X, the future of the town was assured, though it was only represented as yet by these few tents gleaming white in the moonlight. As the men sat around the fire discussing in high spirits the projects which now indeed looked like realities, the question of the name was again brought up.

"It should be decided upon at once," said one gentleman; "the thing is ready now to be brought before the public as prominently as possible, and the name, of course, is of the first importance. Gentlemen, I think there will be only one sentiment among you when I propose the name of one to whose zeal and energy we are indebted more than to anything else for our encouraging prospects, the name of Mr. Bruce Musgrove. I propose that the town be named after him : MUSGROVE."

If Bruce had had any doubt of the estimation in which he was held by the inhabitants of the valley, it might now have been set at rest.

The proposition was accepted with enthusiasm. One and all stood up, making a very picturesque group as the fire-light fell upon their faces, and one and all vociferously declared that the new-born town should be named MUSGROVE.

The young man to whom this honor had been paid, and who sat just a little apart, watched his companions for a moment. For a second time that day he tasted the keen pleasure of gratified ambition, a pleasure which only such minds as his can know. His strong face flushed and then paled, as he rose to his feet and in a few brief words thanked his companions, assuring them that it would be his highest satisfaction to deserve in the future the good things they had said of him, and to help to make the town—his namesake—a credit and pride to the valley and the country.

It was not strange that Bruce lay awake that night long after silence had fallen upon the camp, but it *was* strange and sad that, as he lay building up the fabric of the future under the solemn stars, that gaze upon empires and nations as they rise and fall, there should

have been no thought of HIM without whose will not a sparrow falleth to the ground. Strange and sad that the mind which emanates from Him should not look upward to the "Father of Lights."

That night, as Ada knelt in prayer by the bedside of Edith Ashleigh, earnestly and tenderly she prayed for Bruce.

Was it in answer to that prayer that in the midst of his ambitious dreams a feeling of solemnity or sadness crept upon him, and the words of the hymn which his cousin had sung that Sunday night at the ranch came whispering past him in the wind ?

I was not ever thus, nor pray'd that Thou
Should'st lead me on ;
I loved to choose and see my path ; but now
Lead Thou me on.
I loved the garish day ; and, spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will : remember not past years.

How sweetly, ah, how sweetly she had sung them! With what intensity of feeling ! Yet what could she know of the pride that rules the heart ?

With a feeling of sadness upon him, Bruce fell asleep.

The day had passed so quietly to Ada that when night came she scarcely felt fatigued, yet,

in obedience to Mr. Ashleigh's orders, took her share of rest. Never had she cared for a sweeter and more patient sufferer ; never had nursing been less of a burden, more of a pleasure.

There was a delightful sense of calm, as though the very spirit of peace and holy love brooded over the little dwelling. It seemed a quiet waiting for the Father's will, whether life or death should be the fiat.

It was the first of many days so spent, for although the immediate danger was over and the symptoms were generally favorable, it would be many weeks before Edith Ashleigh could attain even her ordinary measure of health.

So, Ada, with her aunt's loving consent, grieved though Mrs. Musgrove was to part with her niece, even for a season, made up her mind to remain at the parsonage.

Frequent were the visits paid by Mrs. Musgrove to the Ashleighs. It seemed as though her natural tenderness, which for so long a time had had no channel except that of love and care for her children—often, indeed, only another form of selfishness, flowed out in acts of affectionate sympathy towards those who had been until now strangers to her.

Every day or two her kindly face would appear at the parsonage, and Mrs. Ashleigh soon learned to love Ada Selwyn's aunt on other grounds than simply because she held that relation to her friend. Delicacies which only Mrs. Musgrove's experienced hand could construct, fruits and flowers, the finest and most fragrant, were constantly brought from the ranch to the parsonage, oftentimes by Hugh, when his mother herself did not come.

On the second Sunday after Mrs. Ashleigh's illness, Mrs. Musgrove, accompanied by her younger son, attended for the first time the service in the little church at Caliente.

It was no surprise now, but a source of exceeding pleasure, to Mr. Ashleigh to see the mother and son enter the little building. It was with emotion, so deep as hardly to be restrained, that, kneeling by her son's side, she heard, after years of estrangement, the old familiar words of the Church's Service. A voice from the past it seemed indeed; a voice speaking of early years, when, in her far Eastern home she had been surrounded by the influences of religion—a voice which seemed to ask for an account of those long years of worldly prosperity, from which, by slow and sad degrees, all thoughts and aims connected with the higher life had disappeared.

There was far more pain than comfort in it at first, but gradually there came a foretaste, as it were, a dawn of peace, of that peace which the world cannot give nor take away.

Ada would have dearly liked to accompany her aunt, but she would not desert her post ; and it was a deep joy to know that Mrs. Musgrove had really taken the decisive step which Ada felt assured was the beginning of a new life.

By the following Sunday she was herself able to resume her place at the organ, and it was with a thrill of the intensest pleasure that she saw the dear faces of her aunt and cousin among the congregation.

Another and another week passed by, and there came a day when the aunt and niece knelt side by side at the altar, partaking together of the Bread of Life, and we may well believe that prayers unspeakable went up from both their hearts for those nearest and dearest who had not yet turned their faces towards the light.

In all these weeks Ada had neither seen Nettie nor Bruce. Nettie was paying a long visit to her friend, Miss Crofton. A day or two after Ada had gone to Caliente, she had received a loving invitation from her friend,

and Mrs. Musgrove had made no objection to her going, though she would very gladly have kept her daughter with her. Since that night when she had watched Nettie in her sleep, a passionate desire had sprung up within her that her child should lead a worthier life than hitherto, but she looked for Ada to reinforce her own efforts, and in the mean time did not thwart Nettie's wish to leave home.

Bruce had ridden over to the ranch occasionally, but had not passed through Caliente since he had met Ada that early morning. Every day had brought with it business and responsibility; he lived in what was, to his temperament, an exciting atmosphere. He was really the moving spirit in the whirl of stirring ambitions, business projects and activities of various kinds which centred round the new town of Musgrove. It had been necessary to take a couple of trips to San Francisco, for Bruce had been deputed to make the final arrangements about the railway, and to see several land speculators, whose interest in the town of Musgrove would be a great factor in the growth of the place. Success had attended every step which he had taken, and he returned from his second visit with news so favorable that his colleagues were more than ever impressed by his sagacity, tact, and ability.

A slight shadow of coolness had sprung up in Miss Crofton's manner to Bruce since the evening when he had seemed so unnecessarily inclined to defend his cousin from her sarcasm ; but, truth to tell, Bruce in the rush of occupations had not been conscious of it. He had been at the Crofton ranch several times, the more frequently that Nettie was there. Young Crofton would generally propose riding over about sundown, when the business of the day was over, and Bruce often accompanied him. After that one experience Miss Crofton seldom mentioned Ada, but Nettie was often the echo of her friend's remarks, and would sometimes refer to her cousin in her pretty, petulant way, now ridiculing Ada's absurd notions, now complaining that she herself had really been deserted by her mother.

Miss Crofton well knew that ridicule is a most potent weapon of attack, and while Nettie's little speeches were so trifling that it seemed not worth while to notice them, yet they produced a sort of mental irritation. Of all things, Bruce objected to anything being ridiculous, and Miss Crofton, with a skill worthy of a better cause, was trying to make Ada's course of action ridiculous in her cousin's eyes.

CHAPTER XIX.

So the days and the weeks sped by, and it was marvelous how the town of Musgrove took shape, not on paper merely, but in reality. Not white tents only now dotted the gentle incline, but whole blocks of buildings were springing up as if by enchantment, while acres upon acres of the surrounding land were being planted with a hundred varieties of fruit trees, gardens laid out, roads graded in all directions, and, above all, a long perspective of little flags, stretching southward, meant that the coming railway was near at hand.

Then came a day when a great excursion from Los Angeles and San Bernardino and various other points to the new town of Musgrove took place, and whole lines of conveyances, from the heavy country wagon up to the well-appointed city carriage, converged towards the foot-hills, and a great sale of land took place, which was, as it were, the first leap into the light of the new town. Fortunes were made that day, and amongst them that of Bruce Musgrove. He had been a prosperous

man before, but now he was a man of wealth, with the assured prospect of having that wealth doubled or trebled before a few more years should have passed over his head.

The long, long summer had merged into autumn. The grapes had been gathered, and the vineyards had turned brown and sere. The oranges were beginning to ripen, and the deciduous trees were gradually turning bare, while their remaining leaves were putting on the sweet, sad colors of decay.

Dust lay deep, deep upon the roadways; and the uncultivated land, dry and unlovely from the long drouth, looked as though no such lovely things as flowers and verdure could ever spring from it again.

And at last mists gathered among the mountains, and their tops became obscured with clouds, and the autumn rains were spoken of as near at hand.

Hugh had driven over to Caliente to bring Ada back to the ranch. Her return had been delayed again and again, for it was not easy to leave the Ashleighs, to whom her presence had brought such comfort, and where such tender gratitude and affection seemed to enchain her. But Mrs. Ashleigh was so much better than they had dared to hope, and both she and her

husband began to accuse themselves of selfishness in keeping their young friend with them any longer. Then, after diligent search, Ada had found a young orphan girl, gentle and helpful, who was installed as servant, and paid by Mrs. Musgrove as her personal contribution to the missionary.

And, at last, with promises of very frequent visits, and many injunctions to her late patient to take every possible care of herself, and after a tender leave-taking, Ada went away.

"Well, I have got you at last," said Hugh, wrapping a warm rug about his cousin, for the wind blew quite cold; "we have missed you horribly, though of course we could not begrudge you to the Ashleighs. You may have the comfort of knowing that you have saved her life and put new life into him."

Ada laughed away his congratulations.

"Are Bruce and Nettie at home?" she asked; "it seems an age since I saw either of them."

"They were to come back this evening, and I should not wonder if we found them there before us," he replied. "I think Bruce is going to devote himself to home duties for the winter. Everything is going on finely at 'Musgrove,' and my noble brother is coming home almost

a millionaire I believe. It is to be hoped that he will share with his brother, who has been faithfully doing double work in his absence."

"Of course he will," said Ada.

Hugh's horse made splendid time, as if alive to the fact that he was taking Ada back to the Musgrove Ranch, and Ada enjoyed the rapid ride with Hugh beside her, and with the prospect of meeting the others so soon.

She thought that the touch of autumn added to the beauty of the ranch, which wore to her a different aspect, for the deciduous trees, being nearly bare, opened up new views of the mountains. Some of the vines about the veranda were leafless, but the live-oak was green and dark as ever.

"Welcome back, dear child!" said her aunt, who stood awaiting her on the porch. "I cannot tell you half how we have missed you. And Bruce and Nettie are coming too," she added cheerfully; "we shall be all together during the rains. I am so glad, for otherwise it is a dull time when you cannot get out."

It was quite late that night when the brother and sister arrived, so late that Ada could only welcome them and say "good night."

Nettie, after all, was not sorry to come home, and returned her mother's kiss fondly enough.

"Well, Ada," she said, holding her cousin at arm's length, while she looked at her, "I don't think nursing agrees with you; you have got thinner, and paler too," and then she kissed her not ungraciously.

"You are looking splendid," said Ada; "I should think you must have lived on horse-back."

"Well, I did, pretty nearly," said Nettie, laughing. "Louise and I rode up to Musgrove nearly every day. I can tell you we had a great deal of fun."

"You have got home at last, Ada."

It was Bruce who had just entered. He held out his hand, and Ada, looking up at him, thought that he seemed much older than when she had seen him last. He was deeply bronzed by the sunshine in which he had spent so many weeks, and the look of determination which his face had always worn had deepened almost to sternness.

"Yes, Bruce, I got back a few hours ago. Hugh came for me and carried me off."

"Otherwise I suppose you would have remained indefinitely at Caliente."

There was the old mocking tone, which half pained, half pleased her.

"And yet I am glad to be with you all again,"

she said, smiling good-humoredly; "I shall like to be wakened by the workmen's bell to-morrow morning; but I must say 'good night' now, or even that will not waken me."

The gentle voice, the manner so self-possessed, yet so modest, the bright, calm face—Bruce looked at her for a moment or two in silence, until Ada began to think she had offended him again, and then he said "good night."

A change had come over the Musgrove Ranch since Ada had come to live there. It was, in one sense, a house divided against itself; there were "three against two and two against three," for now Ada was not alone in living not for this present world only.

Mrs. Musgrove had yielded herself heart and soul to the blessed influence which in the person of Ada had been brought to bear upon her, and Hugh, most like his mother of all her children, in fulfilling his promise made to Ada, that he would think seriously of the great questions they had spoken of together, had come to see with a strong conviction that life without God is a failure, be it in the eyes of the world ever so great a success.

Neither the ridicule nor indifference of Bruce or Nettie could weigh now either with Hugh or

their mother, but whether their own influence combined with that of Ada could have any weight with the brother and sister remained to be seen.

When Sunday came round Hugh drove his mother and cousin to Caliente. Bruce had not appeared at breakfast ; Nettie looked injured, if not disgusted, when they drove away, but she wasted no words on this occasion except to say that they would certainly be caught in the rain.

It was indeed clouding up heavily on all sides, and the wind blew cold from the southeast, the rainy quarter in Southern California.

They went, however, and returned before the rain began, which it did very soon afterwards.

At first it came in slow and heavy drops, but soon in such rushing torrents that Ada felt almost frightened. The wind, too, rose to a tempest and swept round the house with a roar which seemed to threaten its destruction.

Ada was sitting, in the afternoon, watching the rushing rain and listening to the uproar of the wind, half fascinated, half frightened, when Bruce joined her.

“ We don’t do anything by halves in California,” he said, taking a seat near her ; “ you see, when it rains, it rains. How do you like it ? ”

"Very much," she said, "if it does not sweep us away."

"There is not much danger of that here. Higher up towards the mountains cloud-bursts occur occasionally."

"They must be terrible; have you ever witnessed one?"

"I just escaped one once, but I was glad that I had seen it. It is one of the most awful sights in nature. The tremendous havoc which it makes gives one an idea of chaos."

Then they sat silent for a while, looking out.

CHAPTER XX.

"How near is your new town to the mountains?" said Ada.

"Nearer than this by some miles, but out of the region of cloud-bursts," he answered.

"I was glad when Hugh told me that they had named it 'Musgrove,'" she said; "you deserved it."

Bruce colored.

"Can you consistently think it well that the town should be named after me?" he asked, "a new town—a new centre—after a person who presumes to differ from the orthodox faith?"

"It is a good name," she said softly, "and the time may come when he who bears it will not think that to leave God out of his life and his purposes is a proof of superior strength and wisdom."

The words seemed a severe rebuke, but the soft eyes and sweet, sad lips seemed to plead with him for himself.

Bruce rose abruptly from his seat, walked to and fro for a time, then took it again.

"You do not encourage a man's vanity, at all events," he said, with an angry little laugh; "fortunately vanity is not one of my sins."

"No," she said, "no, I have never thought you vain. Vanity is an unmanly weakness, and you are certainly not unmanly."

"Thank you," he rejoined, scoffingly; "it is really comforting that you do not altogether condemn me."

"I ought not to speak to you, when you ridicule me," she said, quietly, "but, you see, I believe in your better nature. I don't know that I should wish you to be unlike what you are, only—"

"Only what?—but I need not ask; you would like me to be a meek disciple of the Rev. Father Ashleigh, without an independent thought of my own. You would like me to kill out the only part of my being which I value—the freedom and the power of abstract thought."

"I ought to thank you in turn for your high appreciation of me," said Ada, "but you are talking at random, Bruce. You know as well as I do that the power you value most in yourself is no less valuable to me. I have always longed to speak to you of these things, but I have really been afraid of you, Bruce; you were almost cruel to me that day in the Cañon."

"Well, my cruelty did not deter you from following your own way in every particular, and from proselytizing mother and Hugh," he added harshly.

"If faith is anything, it ought certainly to enable us to endure, at least, a little measure of hardness," she said. "I told you that day that it was not a matter of choice with me, but of necessity."

"You righteous people are wonderfully clever in adapting principles to practice."

"You mean that in following my own self-will I quieted my conscience by calling it duty."

"You put it very plainly," he replied.

"If I thought you really took that view of it, I should be very unhappy, but I cannot quite believe it. Bruce, there is something in your inner consciousness that makes you know you're judging me unfairly."

"Why are you not angry with me?" he said impatiently, half kindly; "if you were, there would be some satisfaction in scolding you."

"I am not at all too good to be angry, but when I am sorry about a thing it is a distinct thing from anger."

"And you are sorry for *me*?" he asked, curiously.

"Yes, Bruce," she answered, slowly; "I am

very sorry for you." And again, as on that day in the Cañon, she looked at him with sweet compassion in her face.

A mocking answer was on his lip, but the words remained unspoken.

Again they sat in silence, watching the down-pour, and the trees bending and writhing in the fierce wind.

What an extraordinary change from the scene to which Ada had grown accustomed, the almost perpetual sunshine, the blue skies and brilliant flowers. There was a desolation in it—a sunless world given up to tempest.

When they next spoke it was of other things. Ada was really desirous of knowing all about the new town and its prospects, and she asked her cousin many questions.

"And is it really true, Bruce," she said at last, "or was Hugh joking when he said that you were not far off from being a millionaire?"

"At all events it was not a very gross exaggeration. Are you much impressed with the fact?" he added, laughing.

"Yes, I think I am. Millionaires are rather awful people to me."

"Especially when they are heathen, I suppose?"

"*Especially* when they are heathen ; in fact, then they are absolutely terrible."

"Then I must be in no hurry to become one, as you would shun me altogether."

"But *you* are not going to be a heathen millionaire, Bruce, I have faith to believe."

"Do not deceive yourself," he said; "even you—even you, Ada, cannot unmake me. I am cast in a different mold from my brother."

Nettie came to see what had become of Ada, and thus the longest, and on the whole, the most friendly, talk which Bruce and Ada had had together, since their first difference, came to a close.

All that night the storm raged and the rain fell in torrents. Ada was awake many times listening to the tumult. Once or twice she was on the point of rising and going to her aunt's room, but the utter silence in the house made her conclude that there was no cause for alarm. Towards morning she fell into a deep sleep, which lasted far beyond her usual time for rising, and when she did awake it was to find her aunt standing by her bedside.

"You were having such a deep, sweet sleep, child, that I had not the heart to wake you," she said, "but you are such an early riser that we began to fear that you were not well,

and Bruce sent me up to see what was the matter."

Ada smiled happily. She was glad to know that Bruce had missed her.

"I am ashamed to think of being so late, but, Auntie, I was really frightened at the storm. It sounded dreadful, and—why it is going on still!" she exclaimed, for just then a sheet of rain was driven against the windows and a long howl of wind went round the house.

"O, yes, we shall probably have three or four days of it," said the elder lady, contentedly; "it is not pleasant while it lasts, but, my dear, these autumn rains are our very life. It is a new world for us when they have sunk down into the thirsty land. You will see how much more beautiful this country is when the natural grasses spring up, and when our mountains are capped with snow. But now, get up, and I will go to tell Bruce that you are not sick."

She looked a little archly at Ada, as she spoke, for the idea had for the first time dawned upon her that morning that her son Bruce, the one in whom her pride had chiefly centred, though, to use the homely phrase, she had taken less "comfort" in him than in her other children, was beginning to entertain something

more than a cousinly feeling for Ada. Ah ! if indeed Ada could be her daughter ! If she once had a wife's influence over Bruce, what might she not accomplish !

It was well that Ada knew nothing of the thought passing through her aunt's mind, otherwise she could not have been so absolutely unconscious when she appeared at the breakfast-table refreshed and rosy from her long morning sleep.

"Why did you not tell us you were afraid ?" said Nettie. "I would have gone to comfort you." And Ada owned that she did not want to be thought a coward.

"Weakness number two !" said Bruce ; "rattlesnakes and rain-storms."

It seemed to be going over again the first pleasant days at the ranch, to find that Bruce had got over his harshness, and was at least reconciled to the new order of things. The truth was that among the late excitements and successes of his life, his anger and bitterness of feeling at the new relations between his family and the Ashleighs (not to speak of the church) had lost their force, while, on the other hand, the meek determination of Ada, and her forgiving sweetness, had, all unconsciously to himself, had their influence upon him. Yet, as he had

said to Ada, he was cast in a different mold from his brother ; he was made of "sterner stuff" and it would need a far different process to soften it.

Three days of almost incessant down-pour passed very pleasantly to Ada, shut up within the attractive home of the Musgroves. The temporary separation of the family seemed to have made them the more enjoy each other's society, and Ada would always remember, through the after-years, those days so dark without, so bright within, when a new joy, she knew not what, nor sought to know, was added to her life.

CHAPTER XXI.

BRUCE and his brother, cased in water-proof from head to foot, would sally forth twice a day on a tour of general inspection ; for the elder brother was very systematic in everything connected with the ranch, and trusted very little to those less interested than himself. Stables and stalls, water-pipes and flumes, were taken account of day by day, and the men employed felt that a master's eye was upon them.

On their return to the house, the brothers would bring back some little message from outside to the imprisoned ladies. Once it was a little half-drowned pigeon, which had slipped from the edge of the dove-cote, and Bruce had picked up half-dead, and brought to be nursed back to life by Ada and Nettie. Again it was a bunch of dripping rose-buds, which Hugh had gathered, not open enough to be beaten asunder by the rain ; and on the third evening Bruce brought in a little branch of olive.

"The waters are subsiding," he said, as he

handed them to Ada ; " I bring you the promise of better things."

" It is a beautiful token," she answered, taking it from his hands; " I accept it as such."

She took it up to her room with her and placed it in water, where it lived for many days.

The lengthening evenings in the home-like drawing-room were delightful. Music, chess, and pleasant converse in the softened lamp-light, while the fire of manzanita and Eucalyptus crackled and sparkled in the wide, open grate, and the rushing rain and wind made the contrast more charming.

Ada was an only child and an orphan, and there was something inexpressibly sweet to her in this home-life, into which she had been so lovingly welcomed. How much she herself added to its charms, she was unconscious of, but all the others, even Nettie not excepted, acknowledged her sweet influence.

" Will you sing something, Ada ? " asked Bruce, one evening. It was the first time he had ever asked her.

" What would you like ? " she said.

He would have liked to hear what she had sung that evening when he stood apart looking out into the moon-lit garden. The words and

tones had haunted him ever since, but it seemed incongruous in himself to ask for it.

"Anything you like," he answered.

Opening her music-book, she chanced upon that lovely song, "O wert thou in the cauld blast." Its exquisite melody and pathos made it one of her chief favorites, and she sang to-night as never before.

"My plaidie to the angry airt,
I'd shelter thee, I'd shelter thee."

It was with a pleasure that was almost pain, that Bruce listened to the pure, liquid notes so touching in their simplicity.

"Ada," exclaimed Hugh, "you are the sweetest singer I have ever heard, and that is the loveliest song."

"Do you think so?" she said, laughing softly; "it is a great favorite of mine. Did you like it Bruce?" she asked a little timidly, for he had only thanked her without expressing an opinion.

"Yes," he said, "I like it."

"Sing it again," said Nettie; but Ada, instead of doing so, sang a tender little Italian air which they did not understand.

"I will sing another time," she said. "I do

not like to weary people; that is one of my vanities."

"Just that one beautiful hymn for me, my dear," said Mrs. Musgrove, "Lead, Kindly Light"; and Ada sang it as beautifully as that other night, but without the undercurrent of pain which had touched Bruce so strangely.

"I loved to see and choose the path, but now
Lead Thou me on."

It was with a different feeling in her heart that Ada sang it now; there was more of hopefulness and less of pain. Bruce watched the singer, and his own face, as he did so, grew veiled and sad. He had begun within the last few days to discover his own secret. He had begun to acknowledge to himself that, to use the trite expression, he had "met his fate" in Ada. But it was with no gladness of hope that he said this to himself; he knew too well that between himself and Ada there was a barrier which, to her, would be insurmountable; and, if he knew himself at all, could never be removed.

On the following morning Ada was awakened by a flood of sunshine pouring into her windows. The world looked as if new-born; every fleece of cloud had been swept from the blue dome of heaven, and the mountains, which had

been for days blotted out by clouds, stood forth in all the fullness of their beauty, in every line of light and depth of shadow, exquisitely defined. It was with a sense of joy and loving thankfulness that the young girl looked abroad upon the marvelous scene. As she stood leaning from her window, she heard Bruce's voice calling to her.

"Good morning, Ada," he said, lifting his hat; "you see the deluge is past. How would you like to drive with me to Rocky Cañon this morning? I want to see whether the reservoir is all right. But you must not be afraid of a little rough driving."

"I shall be delighted," she answered; "I was just wishing that we could go somewhere this glorious morning, and I will try to be as little of a coward as possible."

Mrs. Musgrove was a little apprehensive of the drive.

"The roads will be badly washed out after all the rain," she said. "Really, Bruce, I don't feel comfortable about your going, even without Ada."

Hugh thought it would be all right up to the mouth of the Cañon, but that the road from there might be impracticable. He felt strongly inclined to suggest that *he*, and not Ada,

should accompany Bruce, but he had learned to read her face, and saw that she had set her heart on going; so he refrained.

"You can leave Ada at the Hawleys," he said, "and take one of the boys up to the flume with you."

"Of course Ada shall run no risks," said Bruce, a little impatiently; "and if she thinks the drive will tire her too much—"

"Oh, no, do take me, Bruce; I have not had a good long drive for many weeks, and I am really longing to go."

So after breakfast they set out. They had not driven together since the night when Bruce drove his cousin from the picnic, when he had been so harsh and stern, and had shown his character in such an unlovely light. Ada had never liked to think of that evening. But to-day he was at his best, and what a drive it was, and what a day!

Ada had never felt quite so happy in her life before. It was so good to feel that she had so far gained what she had prayed for, without alienating Bruce. And the fact that he had forgiven her, might it not mean that he himself in time might be led by the same blessed influence as the others?

They talked of many things, Bruce showing

so much appreciation of what was beautiful and true, and expressing so much nobility of feeling, that Ada, glancing at him now and then, felt that her first impressions of him must have been true ones, and that his fine face was indeed the index of his mind.

The road towards the mountains, level and sandy, had been beaten smooth and hard by the rain, and driving was excellent. Here and there a covey of quail came tripping across the road from the brushwood on either side, to vanish again at sight of the travelers, and then a flock of wild canaries, sweet singers and delicate, lovely creatures, would flutter upwards into the blue air and settle again upon a bush which contained some attraction of buds or insects.

Already a faint tracery of fresh green was visible here and there upon the ground, a tiny fern-like leaf which Bruce told Ada would develop into the tall wild clover, beloved of horses and cattle.

"When you see our wild flowers," he said, "you will indeed be charmed with California. These slopes will look like 'the field of the cloth of gold' with the velvety orange of the poppy, as it is called, and then again there will be stretches of the richest purple and the

purest white, and mosaics of pink and blue and crimson."

"Ah! it must be lovely indeed!" said Ada, "but I can hardly fancy it more so than it is to-day," she added, with a sigh of contentment.

"I am glad you like our country," said Bruce, slowly, "glad that you feel you can make your home here. It is so, is it not?"

"Yes; though I am very loyal to my past, yet you know, Bruce, in one sense I have been a good deal alone, and there is a delightful sense of home with you all which appeals to me in a way you can hardly understand, because you have never been without it."

Bruce was silent, and she went on.

"Has it ever occurred to you, Bruce, how little we value what we have always had? There was a young girl I knew once who had been blind from early childhood. An oculist had told her parents that her sight might be restored by a difficult and delicate operation, but the people were very, very poor, and besides had grown accustomed to the girl's condition, and so, in time, got rather indifferent about it, as well as considering it beyond possibility to obtain the necessary money for the operation.

"The people lived in a district that I visited,

and from the first time I saw the girl I felt an intense pity for her. She had a sweet, sad face, an appealing face that seemed to go with me when I left her. So I got the necessary money and I took her with me to the famous Doctor G. Poor Josie, that was her name, wanted me to be with her at the operation, and I consented, with the doctor's permission. Am I wearying you, Bruce?"

"No, I like to hear you; go on."

"Well, of course she was herself unconscious of the result for many days, but the doctors told me they had every reason to believe it was altogether satisfactory, and I longed to see and yet almost dreaded the effect upon herself when the time came that she might see.

"O, Bruce, I cannot think of it without a thrill. For a few days I had not seen her, and then—one morning, the doctor took me up to her, telling me that she had been growing accustomed to the light, and was asking for Miss Selwyn. When we went in she was sitting in a softly shaded room; the doctor had prepared her for my coming. Ah, that face, those eyes with the joy of sight in them! She held me by the hands and looked at me as if she could take me into her very life.

" 'Miss Ada! Miss Ada!' she said, 'I see—

I see ! God has given me everything. O, the wonder and the beauty of it. I have always *felt* what you were like—but now I see ! Ah, my good God ! I see !

“ I was so overcome, Bruce, that she had to soothe me like a child. I never can forget it, nor the feeling it gave me of my own dullness and ingratitude. *I had always* possessed the blessing which she had never known till now, and in all my life I had never realized it.”

There was a tender earnestness in Ada's manner, a depth of hidden meaning in her little story, and her voice trembled as she recalled what had affected her so deeply.

Bruce found no words to comment on it.

CHAPTER XXII.

THEY had driven on and on until the sharp rocks which formed the entrance to the Cañon stood out boldly from the mountain background. The road suddenly became rough and encumbered with rocks and boulders, and it was with some difficulty that they proceeded. Just as Ada began to wonder how they were going on, they turned an angle in the road and came in sight of a rough shanty, built in a hollow of the rock, upon a sort of natural platform.

"There is the Hawley place," said Bruce, pointing to it with his whip, "that Hugh spoke of, and, after all, I shall probably have to leave you there. They are decent people, though they will probably seem rough to you. I hope you will not mind waiting there till I come back."

"Oh no, of course not, if you think it best, though, to tell the truth, I had set my heart on seeing the place where our water comes from."

"I am sorry you should be disappointed, but

it would be impossible, I think, to drive further than the Hawleys. You can judge from this what the road would be like farther on. From here it is really a watercourse in the heavy rains, and these scattered rocks and boulders that you see have been carried down by the force of the water. These torrents subside as rapidly as they grow, and this particular one was the overflow from our reservoir, which is built about a mile up the Cañon. I felt a little anxious about it owing to the suddenness and force of the rains after the long dry spell, but it must be all right or the road from this on would be a stream."

Ada listened dutifully, and was impressed by the facts which Bruce imparted, and soon they reached the foot of the slope on which the Hawley place, as it was called, stood.

In answer to a shout from Bruce, two long, lean men, roughly clad and almost as brown as Indians, appeared at the shanty door and came down the slope.

"All right, boys?" asked Bruce. "Have you been up the flume this morning?"

"We was just going to start," one of the men replied. "Mother was took sick last night with one of her bad spells, and we couldn't go before."

"Poor woman, is she better?" asked Ada.

"I guess she'll do now," he replied, eyeing the young lady curiously.

"Well, one of you can stay with her, now that I am here. Joe, you can come with me, and Bob can stay and look after Aleppo. How is the road? Do you think this young lady could walk up to the pit?"

"Well," said Joe, who seemed spokesman, reflectively chewing his tobacco—"well, I guess, if she ain't afeared of wearing out her shoes, she can come. It's pretty rough, though."

Ada laughed. "My shoes are strong," she said, "and I should dearly like to try."

"You *shall* try," said Bruce, and he sprang down from the buggy and lifted his cousin out.

Bob was left in charge of Aleppo, and the three set out up the Cañon.

"Pretty rough" was a very mild expression, for the condition of the road, which was simply no road at all, so filled up was it with rubble from the rocks, not to speak of boulders and sharp fragments of a much larger size.

Ada was soon strongly tempted to desist, but Bruce was so patient with her unsteady footsteps and altogether so encouraging, that she persevered, and after a little became more accustomed to the difficulties of the way.

"You will make quite a mountaineer," said Bruce, glancing at the sweet face with an unwonted glow upon it; "there is everything in being accustomed to difficulties. After a time they grow so much less formidable as almost to disappear."

"You are a philosopher, Bruce," she answered, "but I am afraid I was very foolish to encumber you with my helpless person. I could not walk ten yards without you."

"I don't suppose you could," he said, laughing, "but you see my philosophy includes a willingness to be encumbered by you, if you wish to use the term."

Joe was some twenty yards ahead of them, apparently stumbling and sprawling, but in reality balancing himself, with the skill that comes from long practice, on slanting rocks and rounding boulders, and getting on with much ease and comfort to his ungainly person.

Ada was so engrossed with trying to pick her way and keep her footing that she was unable to realize the savage beauty of the Cañon sides, which grew in majesty and wildness as the way wound on between them. It seemed to the girl's tired feet like many miles, but in reality they had only walked one when Bruce told her to look up. They had nearly reached

their destination. In front of them rose a sheer wall of rock to a dizzy height, and from its summit poured a stream which had gathered among the upper heights of the mountains and descended from slopes and ledges till it reached this final downfall. Like the water-fall which Ada had seen in the other cañon, it dashed itself into foam upon the rocks before it was gathered into an immense reservoir, in part natural, in part built of cemented stones, which was exclusively the Musgrove property and the direct source of the beauty and fruitfulness of the Musgrove ranch. Thither the water was flumed and piped down the Cañon and across the valley.

To a person unaccustomed to such scenes, this was almost overpowering. The vast height of the precipice, the weird and sombre forms of the mountains rising in an almost complete circle around them, the huge reservoir, filled to overflowing with dark water, combined to make a picture which photographed itself on Ada's brain. She shuddered slightly, as leaning on Bruce's arm she gazed around her.

"It is an awful picture, is it not?" he said, looking at her with some solicitude, for the flush had faded from her face, and she looked very tired.

"Yes," she answered, almost under her breath, "it is an awful picture. Do you know, Bruce, if you were not with me, I think I should give way to a feeling of horror."

"But you would not be here without me," he said, more fondly than he knew. "Ada, I am sorry I let you come. It has been too much for you. Hugh was right; you should have remained at the Hawleys: I blame myself."

"No, no. I *would* come. I did so want to come. If there is any one to blame it is certainly myself alone."

"I am going to make a comfortable seat for you, and you shall rest while I go round the reservoir with Joe. It is necessary to look narrowly at the wall to see if any repairs are needed. It looks all right and tight, however."

He found a flat stone and laid it across two others, where she could rest against a rock, a little below the reservoir, and when he had seen her comfortably seated, he left her, saying that he would not lose sight of her for a moment, and that she need have no fear whatever of rattlesnakes so soon after a rain. And then he followed Joe, who was still balancing his long and awkward body from stone to stone as he began the circuit of the reservoir.

Ada watched the two men, smiling to herself,

though she had not yet got over her nervous uneasiness at the strange contrast which they represented—Joe, loose-limbed and ungainly, Bruce, tall, erect, and firmly knit, yet lithe as only one accustomed to mountain exercise can be. His cousin watched him almost step by step as he walked slowly on, skirting the edge of the dark water and turning again and again to watch her.

It was such a relief, after that terrible mile, to rest her tired feet and to lean against the rock, that after a time—it was really only a little time—Bruce's figure seemed to grow indistinct and the shadows of the projecting rocks to enfold her with a deep cloud of dreams, and then she sank into a profound slumber.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A STILLNESS as of death brooded over the place, for the footsteps of the two men, who had now reached the point of the reservoir farthest from Ada, had long ceased to be audible, and the inflowing water from the upper rocks, though constant and copious, was without a sound.

How long she had rested in that trance-like slumber Ada never knew. But what was this which wakened her with a start of unspeakable horror? What was the awful sound which tore the stillness like the voice of many thunders?

She sprang, or, rather, staggered to her feet. What, oh what was THIS rolling towards her in awful, unimaginable force—the very image of destruction!

One instant she stood, while with the despair of a young life brought suddenly face to face with death, a piercing cry escaped her; then, lifting her eyes and hands to Heaven, she sent one unuttered prayer to the Master whom she had learned to serve so humbly and love so well.

The rock against which she had been leaning was broken into hollows and ledges, of which a strong climber could have availed himself without much difficulty to escape the on-rushing water, but Ada's strength was spent.

Yet she turned wildly, and standing on the seat which Bruce had made for her, she reached upward and strove with a supreme effort to gain a footing on a narrow ledge somewhat above her.

Before her feet had touched it, however, the water, leaping onward like an enraged lion, had caught the slender form, lifting it for a moment, and in the next had hidden it from sight.

Bruce, at the farther end of the reservoir, had heard the awful crash, which for the moment stunned him with its appalling noise. His eyes distended with horror as he saw his cousin's position. He saw her rise to her feet, saw, even as he rushed madly towards the spot, her effort at escape; he saw the awful wave that seemed to cast itself upon her.

His brow was wet with the dew of a great agony, as he realized his own helplessness in that terrible moment, and from his lips came words wrung from the bitterness of his soul.

“Save her—my God—save her!”

It was the first prayer which Bruce had uttered for long years. It was the instinctive cry of a soul naked and helpless in the face of its dire need.

“Save her—my God—save her!” that was all.

Leaping from stone to stone, getting over the awful intervening space he knew not how, Bruce reached the spot to find that the torrent had rolled on down the slope, turning the bottom of the Cañon into a seething river. With despairing eyes he looked around him and before him. Had the flood carried Ada's body down among the dreadful crags and boulders?

At that moment he would have given all he possessed, all hope, all ambition, all success—everything that had made up his life, nay, life itself, to have rescued her.

As he stood there in his helpless wretchedness, Joe, his rough-hewn face blanched with horror, came up to him.

“The young lady!” he gasped; “what's come of her?”

Bruce could only answer with a groan.

Wading knee deep in water, they reached the spot where she had been sitting. Was it

—could it be possible that the water had lifted her on to the rocks !

It was in reality only the edge of that dreadful wave which had reached Ada. It had been more than sufficient, however, to overcome her feeble strength, and to cast her apparently lifeless form into a depression of the rocks, a projection of which she had endeavored to climb.

As Bruce looked wildly around, he saw a fragment of her dress. The sight of it drove the blood to his heart with a fierce throb of fear and hope. He climbed upon a slippery ledge, and looking down, saw within a few yards of him Ada's seemingly lifeless body.

In a moment he was beside her, chafing the cold hands, resting the wan face with its fast closed eyes upon his breast, calling upon her with a passionate tenderness to speak to him once more.

Bruce's prayer was answered, though from lips so long prayerless, for God is truly a merciful and loving Father; and when at last, with a long, shuddering sigh, Ada's eyes unclosed and met her cousin's with a look of wonder first, then with a dreadful remembrance, at last with tender recognition, Bruce's heart, moved to its depth, was smitten through and

through with a consciousness of God's mercy and his own unworthiness.

"Did you save me, Bruce?" whispered Ada in that first sweet moment of restored life, looking into her cousin's face.

"No, dear, no, not I—but the God whom I disowned and denied. He saved you!"

Ada closed her eyes again, and her lips moved in words that Bruce could not hear, and yet whose import he knew.

Yes, Ada was saved, as by a miracle, but she was chilled and exhausted, and it was a painful problem how they were to get back to the mouth of the Cañon.

But here Joe's experience stood them in good stead. He knew a way—it was indeed a very difficult one; even Joe owned to its being pretty hard to travel—by which they could reach the place whence they had started. Bruce wrapped his coat about Ada, and half supported, half carried, her along a path which only a strong-headed and enduring person could have traveled unassisted.

And at last, at last, they reached the "Hawley place" to find the old woman and Bob in a state of excitement and dismay, for the sudden rush of water along the Cañon bottom had told only too plainly what had occurred,

and their fears for the safety of the party had been of the gravest. Their rejoicing was proportionately great when the three returned. Ada was, however, terribly exhausted, and had to rest for hours after being furnished with dry garments by the old woman, before the journey back to the ranch could be attempted.

At the ranch, too, great was the anxiety at the protracted absence of the cousins. Hugh at length set out to discover the cause of the delay, feeling far more uneasy than he had allowed his mother or Nettie to suspect.

Half-way to the Cañon mouth, he met them, Aleppo traveling homeward with a speed which betrayed Bruce's eager anxiety to reach the ranch as speedily as possible.

The words of explanation were few, and it was not until hours afterwards that the others knew the extent of the peril through which Ada had passed.

My tale of the Musgrove Ranch is nearly ended. Those who have followed with a kindly interest my simple story will be glad to know that Bruce Musgrove, from that dreadful moment when he felt himself utterly powerless to avert so terrible a calamity, and threw himself with an instinct of faith upon the mercy

of God, never relapsed into a condition of mind which was so unworthy of his strong and noble nature.

And thus, when, after weeks of suffering, caused by the exposure of that terrible day, Ada was well enough to hear the story which Bruce's heart had so long prompted him to tell, there was no reason why she should not admit that her whole heart was indeed bound up in the dear Musgrove Ranch, but more particularly in him who had made it what it was.

We need not feel any special sympathy with Miss Crofton, who was not long in consoling herself for Bruce's failure to appreciate her attractions, and even condescended to be a guest at the wedding—a wedding which was almost the happiest day in the life of the faithful missionary at Caliente; for Bruce Musgrove, who, like the California climate, did nothing by halves, had long since admitted his injustice and arrogance to so brave and patient a person, and had become his staunchest friend and supporter.

There was no likelihood that in the future, within the reach of Bruce Musgrove's influence and example, there would be clergy wretchedly housed and living on a pittance, or whose ear-

nest and self-denying labors would be held in contempt.

Mrs. Ashleigh, not quite so frail, and so much happier than of old, was specially so in the happiness of the girl who had been the direct cause, by God's blessing, of the new and brighter era which had opened for the Church in that favored region.

And as for Hugh and Nettie and dear Mrs. Musgrove, it was to one and all a day of great rejoicing, for now it was a settled fact that she whom they had learned to love so well was permanently to have her home at the Musgrove Ranch.

THE END.

